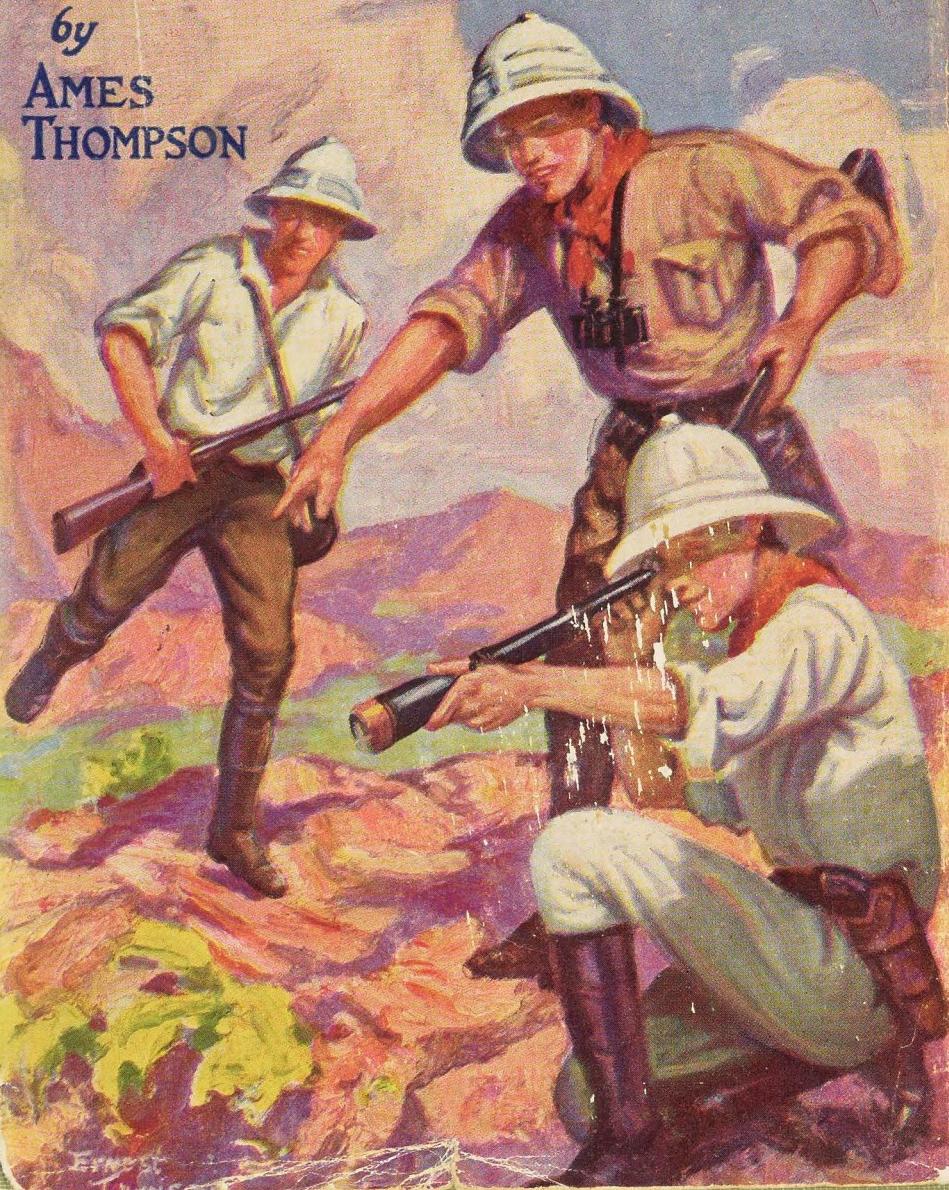


The ADVENTURE BOYS *and the* LAGOON of PEARLS

by
AMES
THOMPSON



Ernest
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1st Ed.

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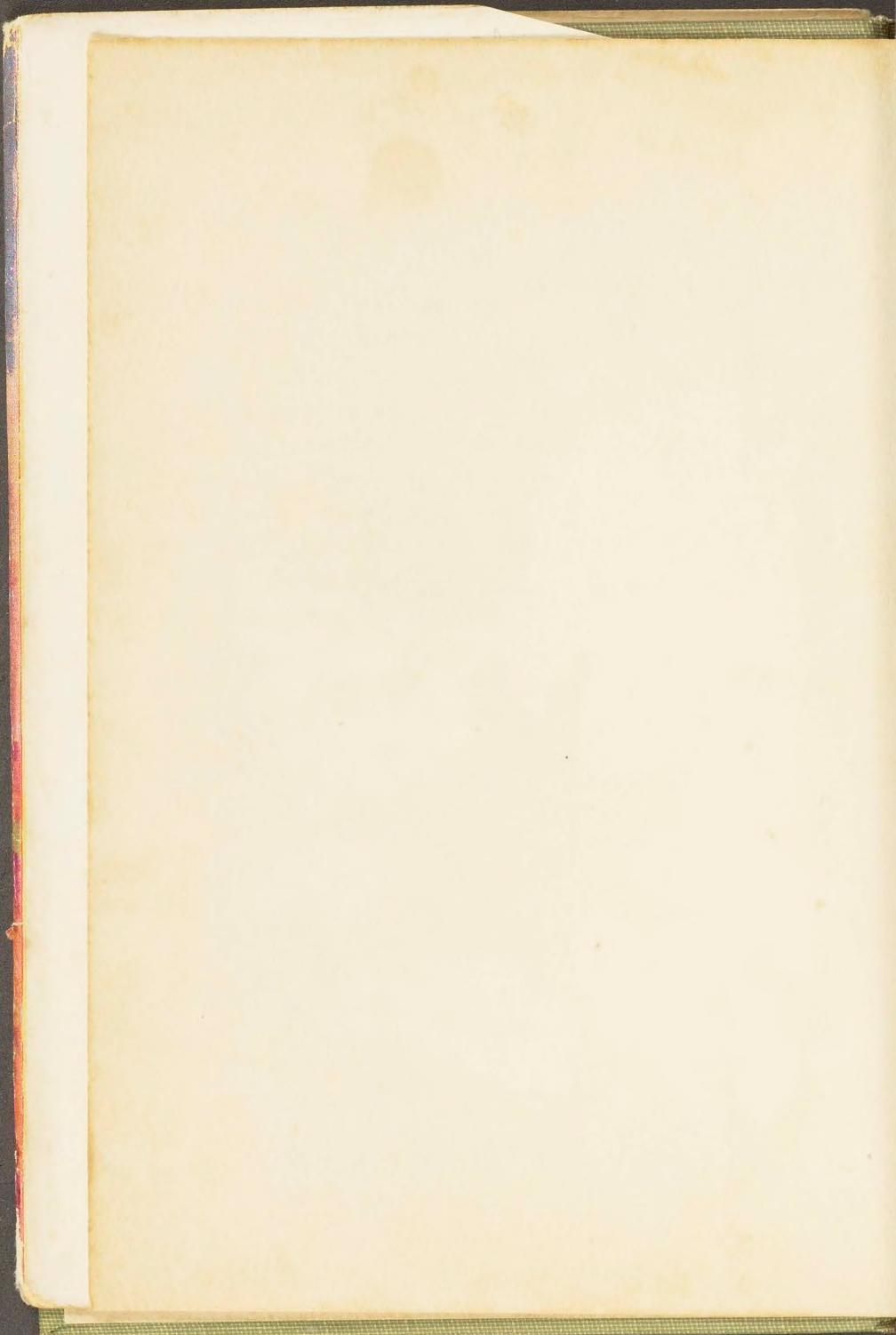
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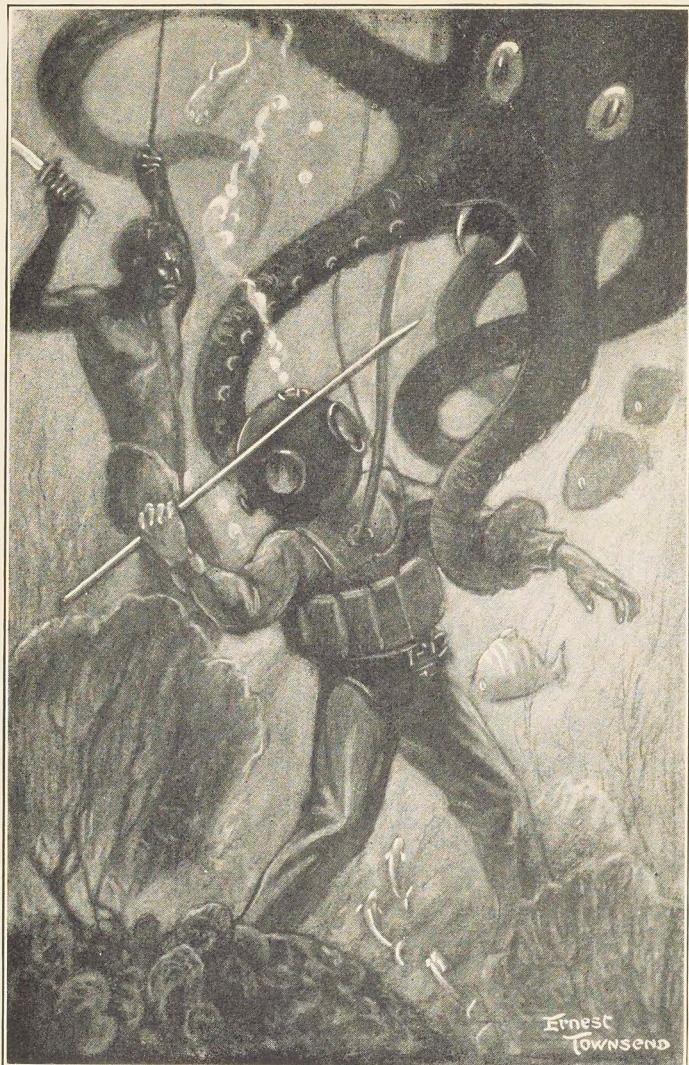
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John B. Hall







WITH ALL THE STRENGTH HE HAD, RALPH DROVE THE
STEEL BAR INTO ONE OF THE GLARING EYES
The Adventure Boys and The Lagoon of Pearls. Page 151.

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THE
ADVENTURE BOYS
AND THE
LAGOON OF PEARLS

By
AMES THOMPSON

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

THE JEWEL SERIES

By AMES THOMPSON

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THE ADVENTURE BOYS
And the Valley of Diamonds

THE ADVENTURE BOYS
And the River of Emeralds

THE ADVENTURE BOYS
And the Lagoon of Pearls

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THE ADVENTURE BOYS AND THE LAGOON OF PEARLS

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THE ADVENTURE BOYS AND THE LAGOON OF PEARLS

CHAPTER I

AN INHOSPITABLE SHORE

“**L**AND, ho! L-a-n-n-n-d, ho-o-o!” Ralph Edwards raised his voice to stentorian heights as he announced the sight of the long coast line, still indistinctly seen through the early morning mist. “Hey, there, Commander Green! What name? Where are we at?”

“I’ll say it’s Malaita.” Stanley Green continued to gaze at the mist-wreathed island toward which the *Swallow*, pearl among sea-going yachts, was swiftly traveling. He had been studying it intently through glasses for several minutes.

“Then it’s not for us,” Ralph rejoined in his light genial fashion. “*Great guns! Look.*” His own glasses had picked up a score or more of black figures popping suddenly into view from behind the green ramparts of a bush-grown beach. “Something’s stirring over there.”

"Hark. Hear that?" Green raised a finger in a listening pose.

Faintly upon the light morning breeze came a hollow, reverberating sound. It continued steadily, in curious measured rhythm.

"War drums," Green identified with the positiveness of one who has just heard a familiar sound. "I'm not likely to forget the rattle of those cannibal time-beaters. I almost got kai-kai'd (eaten) to drum music on San Cristoval the first voyage I made to the Solomons."

"*Gee whilliken!* Look at the blamed savages! They're piling into war canoes! Those canoes are whoppers, too!" Ralph's voice had risen to an excited shout.

"They sighted us first, I'll say. There must be a pair of glasses among that frizzy-headed mob. Stolen probably from some poor fellow who ventured to land on Malaita, and was kai-kai'd right after he got there," was Green's grim opinion.

"There must be twenty-five or thirty canoes!" Ralph's excitement increased as he continued to watch the rapidly moving black forms on the island shore. What had appeared as a huge, fan-shaped low pier on the white sands had now broken up into long brown streaks, shooting out singly, or in pairs in the blue water of a little bay. War canoes manned by rows of savage black paddlers.

Within ten minutes after Stanley Green and

Ralph Edwards had sighted the island coast, the sunlit waters of the bay were swarming with the long, out-rigger canoes, peculiarly a product of the South Seas.

"Where's Dad? He's probably with Simms, taking an eyeful of this latest feature of the program. No, here he comes! What do you think of *that?*?" Ralph called out with sharp emphasis to his father as Malcolm Edwards came hurrying across the *Swallow's* narrow afterdeck to the rail. "Toppo reception! What?"

"Too toppo for comfort. We'll proceed to show a clean pair of heels," was Malcolm Edwards' quick reply. "Granted our business took us to Malaita, I'd not land on that bit of beach off there with such black prospects in sight," he added humorously.

"You should worry about the cannibals," Ralph said in a teasing tone. He shot a glance of boyish pride at his father, whose matter-of-fact acceptance of the menace of cannibals in the near vicinity had called forth his admiration.

"I might worry about them if I got too near them," was the jewel man's laughing retort. "I'm not going to make such a mistake. We'll give Malaita the go-by, sail around its southern end, then continue west to Guadalcanaar. I've just come from the wheel after having given Simms that order."

"Those blacks can certainly send their canoes zipping through the water," Ralph commented, intent on watching the darting flotilla of long war canoes. They were approaching the yacht at what seemed to him a rapid rate of speed.

"But it won't do 'em any good. Wait a minute until we begin really to leave 'em behind, then listen to the howl they'll let out," Green said with a half sardonic grin. "Oh, gee, they'll be sore!"

Surely enough, within five minutes after the sailor's prediction, wild shouts and cries of disappointment and anger rent the clear morning air. The black-skinned occupants of the approaching canoes were redoubling their efforts to come up with the *Swallow*.

The three men at the rail caught the gleam of flashing cane knives in the sun, brandished by some of the blacks. Others flourished what they guessed to be throwing spears, long-hafted and slender with sharp bone tips. Still others wore quivers of arrows slung from bare black shoulders. Of a sudden a flight of arrows drifted toward the yacht, falling several hundred yards short. The savage bowmen had woefully miscalculated the distance between their canoes and the *Swallow*. They continued to brandish their spears, standing up hardly in the canoes, but they did not make the mistake of throwing the weapons.

Not for an instant had the beating of the

war drums on shore ceased. They continued their spooky, hollow rumble, as though trying to convey to the yachtmen an inkling of the dark fate that awaited them on the wooded island shore.

"Jerusalem crickets!" Bret Hartson suddenly whizzed around a corner and into the midst of the group of watchers on the after-deck. Close at his heels came Jimmy Stone. Both young men were full of excitement over this latest development of their ocean voyage.

"Just like that!" Ralph playfully caught Bret by the shoulders and swung him around till he faced the island shore. "They're getting things ready for a grand banquet. Jewel-hunter stew will be the big feature."

"They thought so about five minutes ago, but they've changed their ideas," returned Jimmy. "I don't believe these cannibal islanders could ever win us for dinner as long as we stick to the *Swallow*. Nothing like playing safe, when the playing's good."

"But if we happened to see a distress signal flying somewhere from shore with a white man behind it, nothing could keep us from making an effort to rescue him," Green put in meditatively.

"That's probably the way more than one white South Sea rover has been killed," Bret asserted. "Suppose there really was a man over there in distress. We'd have to try to res-

cue him at night. Even then we'd be more than likely to lose our heads before we ever beached the *Swallow's* boat."

"That's the queer part about these islands," Green answered. "Some fellows have got by with making a landing on cannibal islands while others have been speared the minute they came within canoe reach of these man-eaters. They'll always take a fellow's head at the last, even if they've pretended to be friendly. They're Melanesian, you know, not Polynesian."

"What's the difference between Melanesian and Polynesian?" questioned Bret. "I thought all these brownies and blackies were just different shades of Malays."

"Nope. The Polynesians are brown men, and in the case of the Tahitans and Hawaiians are fine fellows. But the Melanesians are blacks, and much lower down the scale of life than are the African negroes. These fellows on the shore have kinky black hair, and they are a no-browed, low-browed set," Green finished with a mirthless smile.

"They're certainly no friends of mine," Bret said waggishly. "This clergyman, the Reverend Richard Sanford, that we are going to visit on Guadalcanar must bear a charmed life. Didn't you say he had been established on Guadalcanar for ten years, Mr. Edwards?"

"Yes. He has written me occasionally since he first took up his work there among the

savages. He has a good-sized house which he built mostly with the help of the natives not very far from the island beach, and on the south side of Guadalcanar."

"He'll be on the watch for us, if he has received Dad's letter. He wrote three, one after another, nearly six months ago. Sanford must surely have got one of them. I tell you what, Sanford is a game fellow. He's a good sport, through and through, and Dad says he won prizes galore at college in athletics. I don't remember him very well. I was only eight years old when I went with Dad to see Sanford off to the South Seas. He was some boy then for looks. He had dandy broad shoulders and was good and tall. I can remember that much about him. Somehow I always think of him as 'Sanford,' not the Reverend Sanford. I hope he won't mind if I call him that, but I'll say right now, I don't believe I'll ever call him anything but Sanford," Ralph ended with a little laugh.

"He must have a big supply of the right sort of nerve. Minister or no minister, I wonder how he's put in ten years on one of these Solomon man-traps, and lived to tell of it." Stanley Green's tones registered his marked admiration for the Reverend Richard Sanford. "Some honor to meet a man of his kind."

"Yes; Dick Sanford is a man among men. We both attended Stamford University at the

same time. After he was graduated from there, he went to a theological school," Mr. Edwards said reminiscently. "I was not surprised, later, to hear from him as getting ready to go to Guadalcanar. I knew he was eager to go to the South Seas as a missionary. The Stamford men used to call him the 'Fighting Parson' because he was always ready to champion a fellow student who was in the right, but had got the worst of it. He was a fighter in athletic sports, too. How he would fight to see his team win! He might have been the most popular man in his class if he had set out to be. But he wasn't interested in himself as other than a religious worker."

While the trio on the afterdeck stood talking the *Swallow* had been steadily drawing further and further away from the dangerous island coast. They could still hear the weird reverberations of the cannibal drums. The long canoes full of angry gesticulating black warriors had come to a momentary stop on the light swell of the clear blue sea. Wild discordant yells assailed the ears of the yachtsmen. Spears were brandished menacingly at the trim yacht as she speedily made her get-away.

Continuing to watch the maneuvers of the flotilla of war canoes, the Adventure Boys soon had the satisfaction of seeing the head hunters' boats begin shooting through the water toward the beach. The drums, however, went on with

their forbidding rumbling until the inhospitable shore had become a dim and distant line.

"That's the last of Malaita, thank you." Ralph nodded ironically in the direction of the rapidly receding coast line of the island.

"It would have been the last of us if we'd tried to land there. While we stick to the *Swallow* I defy any gang of head hunters to get at us," was Bret's boast, accompanied by an audible sigh of satisfaction.

"We could fight off an army of cannibals without losing a man, I believe," Jimmy echoed with equal enthusiasm.

"They'd get a howling surprise if they tackled the *Swallow's* rail," Ralph smiled, as he glanced down at the triple-wired boat rail. A major switch in Mr. Edwards' stateroom turned on an electric current sufficiently powerful to force an unwelcome intruder, or intruders, away from the rail and into the water.

It had been Stanley Green's suggestion that the *Swallow* should be provided with an electrical safety equipment warranted to forcibly expel obstreperous, would-be boarders. It worked with prompt dispatch. The Adventure Boys had each taken a turn at braving the fairly powerful electric current which Mr. Edwards had switched on from his stateroom. Each had ruefully testified regarding its effectiveness by straightway letting go and tumbling back into the water.

Green alone had managed to cling to the electrically charged rail until Mr. Edwards had increased the power to a point that forced the sailor to let go and take a swim.

"White-man power," Green said to Bret, with a proud air. "Where is there anything else like it? A white man can—"

"Co-oo-ee! Oo-oo-oo-ee!" The high shrill call came across the water to the east of the yacht with plaintive repetition.

"Somebody's afraid of sharks, or else shipwrecked." Green was already sweeping the dimpled expanse of bright blue sea with his glasses.

"We're going away from the fellow who's doing the yelling." Mr. Edwards hurried from the afterdeck to the speaking tube.

"Come on back. Simms has picked up the call," Green yelled after the jewel man's retreating figure. "We're slowing down."

Surely enough the *Swallow* was now slipping slowly along through the sunlit ripples, obedient to Captain Simms' slightest turn of the wheel. Malcolm Edwards had swung round at Green's words and rejoined the four Adventure Boys at the rail. His own marine glasses as well as Ralph's were now busy.

"I see him." Bret sent up a sudden triumphant cry. His keen eyes had sighted, without the aid of glasses, what looked like a large black ball bobbing on the surface of the waves.

The black ball was some distance behind the yacht now, but the watchers could still see it distinctly, and were still hearing the wild, pleading cries. Underneath the black ball showed a black face.

In the same moment the *Swallow* had turned and was going about to pick up the black man.

"Maybe we've bagged a sure-enough head hunter," Jimmy said lightly.

"I guess there's not much doubt of it. That bunch of top wool looks the part," Green returned. "Well, here we go to take a close-up."

The *Swallow* was now approaching the black. He was swimming rather weakly toward the yacht, as though exhausted. Less than a hundred yards of sea rippled between the native and the *Swallow*.

"*What name?*?" Leaning far across the rail Green flung the stentorian, questioning hail at the nearly exhausted swimmer. "I say you, you fella in the sea. Who you? My word, you swim too much. *What name?*?"

CHAPTER II

THE CRY ACROSS THE WATER

"**M**E Gola. Me good fella. No belong spear. No belong trouble." The black swimmer raised himself a little from the surface of the water to make this reply, his wild dark eyes fastened hopefully upon Green.

The men at the rail did not find a close-up of Gola specially reassuring. He was a typical Melanesian, low-browed, his forehead receding sharply, with a thick-lipped mouth and a mop of kinky hair that stood out on his head in a positive brush. He had a clay pipe thrust through a newly healed slash in one ear and a huge turtle shell ring depending from his nose. Fastened on each side of his immense mop of coarse black hair by a curious 'gator skin band was a formidable, razor-bladed cane knife.

"You fella Gola, where you belong?" Green flung authoritatively at the black man.

"Me belong Guadalcanar. Me no belong Malaita." The swimmer jerked his frizzy head in a backward movement toward Malaita. "Three fella an' me along Guadalcanar, six fella along

San Cristoval go sail our boat. Plenty big strong fella along Malaita catch'm boat; catch'm fella, too. Malaita fella kai-kai all fella from Guadalcanar, 'cept me and my brother. Runee way early this morning. Belong dive. We watch'm chance. Jump along sea. Malaita fellas watch'm boat." He swung up a bare black arm from the water and waved it toward the *Swallow*. "No see us belong sea. Bime bye, can't find. They too much cross along. Kill quick; they catch, then kai-kai. You take me along fella boat. Me good fella. Me no gammon," he pleaded with desperate earnestness.

"You mebbe fella head hunter. How I know you no gammon? You too much knives belong hair. All same maybe you don't belong truth," Green answered skeptically.

"No, no. Me good fella. *Me* no gammon. *Me* missionary." The fellow set up a last desperate plea.

"What name you say? Missionary?" The sailor pretended more surprise than he actually felt. He was not unfavorably impressed by the man in the sea as a result of his quizzing. There was an odd air of ingenuousness about the islander that belied his decidedly hostile appearance.

"Yes. *Me* missionary," the black repeated with emphasis. "Me good friend fella Marster

belong mission house, Guadalecanar. He say me belong truth."

"What name?" Green kept the expression of his face wisely blank. "What name fella belong missionary?"

"He belonged Sanford. Me stop along mission house all while, four fella years. Come along my brother, five fellows San Cristoval, see me. We sail fella boat, three fella missionaries go along, too. Me tell you 'bout strong fella Malaita catch'm; kai-kai." A half scowl appeared on the black's narrow forehead as he went back to the incident of the capture and subsequent kai-kai-ing (eating) of his comrades. Nevertheless, he remained at a kind of respectful attention in the water, making no attempt to draw nearer to the yacht. He was looking earnestly at Green for a favorable verdict.

"You fella in sea, wait along." With a quick encouraging flourish of the arm, Green hurriedly disappeared, returning in a moment or two with a rope ladder. He secured it at the rail, on the port side of the afterdeck and dropped it over.

It was a fairly long ladder and ended only four or five feet from the surface of the sea. The troubled black eyes of the native brightened as he glimpsed the ladder. He had not spoken a word to the others, nor had they spoken to him. "Leave him to Green," Mr.

Edwards had advised Ralph in particular, in an undertone. "He understands these islanders and we don't."

"My word. You fellas Gola come up fellas ladder quick," Green wagged an approving head at the islander's nimble ascent of the rope ladder.

Not for the fraction of an instant did he remove his gaze from the tall, well-muscled islander. Gola wore nothing but a very narrow breech-clout and a string of white shells above one black knee. He was evidently a very young man; not more than nineteen, Green decided, and with a swimmer's broad shoulders, symmetrically muscled arms and slim waist.

"Me allays quick," he declared proudly. With a sudden swift movement he plucked the pair of sharp two-edged knives from his matted hair and offered them to Malcolm Edwards. "You fellas marster this boat?" he questioned respectfully. "Belong me two knife. You take along two knife, belong you."

"Good work!" exclaimed Ralph. A little burst of approbation was also heard from Bret and Jimmy.

"Some wise boy," Jimmy said. "You fellas Bossy Edwards can't get away from looking like a boss," he laughingly told the jewel man. "You belong boss. I'll have to get busy and learn to talk that belong patter. What did you say it was called, Green?"

"*Bêche de mer.* It's the easiest thing ever to pick up," the sailor answered. "All you do is make a start at it. After that it talks itself."

None of the adventurers had betrayed by the slightest sign or word their interest in the native's assertion that he knew the Reverend Richard Sanford and had lived at the mission house for four years.

"If what this fellow says is true, we are in luck," Mr. Edwards commented in Spanish to his comrades and son. "He will be able to guide us directly to the point of the southern shore of Guadalcanar on which the mission house is situated. "Do you believe he is giving us guff, Green?"

"No. I have an idea he has been talking straight enough. It's likely he and his brother got mixed up with that gang of blacks from San Cristoval. The man-eaters from Malaita caught 'em and finished 'em; all except him and his brother. A wonder they escaped such a gang as we saw."

"I'll try asking him a few questions, if you don't mind, Stanley. I won't attempt *bêche de mer* yet. He'll probably get what I say in English. I'm anxious to hear more about Sanford; provided he knows anything more about my old friend the parson.

"How long ago you sail in boat with other fellows?" the jewel man asked the native.
"You savvee?"

"Yes; me savvee. Me know how talk; belong talk like missionary," Gola replied with proud promptness. "Me no 'member how long." He gave his frizzy head a puzzled shake.

"One week?" Mr. Edwards endeavored to help remembrance along.

"Belong more one week. Belong more two week. Mebbe belong four week." Gola arrived at this conclusion after due deliberation. "Me belong tree. Plenty strong big fella tie me, strong fella tie. 'Nother fella, Laru, my brother, alongside me, that fella tie same strong way. No can break way. No can do. Make'm tie hard, me belong tired. Savvee?"

"Me savvee." Mr. Edwards easily dropped into the makeshift English of the island world.

"Sun come yest'day. Malaita fella. Belong talk, talk. They say soon belong kai-kai my brother; kai-kai me. This do sun come again, belong high t'day. See this boat quick b'long sea. All run, belong canoes. Only Marys left. They run way in woods; 'fraid. My brother cry. He no want be kai-kai. Me have little knife hid belong hair. Make'm do." He shook his head violently to illustrate his meaning.

"Knife no belong hair more, fall out. Belong toes; pick's up." He lifted a broad black foot and curled up the toes of it, showing how he had cleverly picked up the knife with his toes. He then bent far forward, bringing his

wrists down to his toes. "Make'm do," he repeated.

"*Good work, old college chum!*" came from Ralph in a burst of approval. "What happened next?"

The islander cast a swift, half perplexed glance at Ralph. "Me no gammon," he informed Ralph reproachfully.

"Sure you're not gammoning. Neither am I." Ralph grinned boyishly at the other young man.

Gola stared silently at young Edwards for at least a minute keeping up the solemnity of an owl. Then he looked toward Malcolm Edwards again and went on to say:

"Me hurry; belong hurry in a minute. Run quick my brother. Cut'm strong fella tie. No fella see. Marys see belong shut up. Malaita fella kill'm, they talk, talk. Malaita fella say too much talk talk belong Marys. They no good. Kill'm quick; kai-kai."

"The Malaita fellas are certainly a chivalrous lot," was Jimmy's sarcastic opinion. "Pretty hard work to make much headway with such heathens. I'd not care to change jobs with the Reverend Richard Sanford. Excuse me, Gola. Me no belong buttinski any more."

"Gu-r-r-r." Gola made a pleased chuckle at Jimmy's joking apology. His heavy features lightened a trifle, but he still preserved his solemn expression.

"Me, my brother Laru, run quick. Me go daunt along one fellas chief house, find plenty cane knives. Take'm two me; two belong my brother. Hurry up then, run sea; belong sea. Swim plenty under water. Marys no see'm swim. Swim far out. Swim where no belong canoes. Canoes go 'nother way." Gola waved a black arm toward the north. Malaita fella go north way, try catch'm this boat."

"It's a good thing for them they didn't catch up with it," Bret commented dryly. To Gola he now said: "Aren't there plenty of sharks in these waters?"

"Belong plenty," the black man nodded. "Can no help. Must do." He raised his powerful shoulders with a kind of resigned futility. "Better belong shark kai-kai'm b'long kai-kai Malaita fella."

"Sharks for mine, if I had to go to it," Ralph agreed with light irony. The lurking flippancy of his tone again caught the attention of the islander. Again he fastened his serious gaze upon Ralph's face with a puzzled air. "And you won, anyway. Great work!" Ralph treated the young savage to one of his wide roguish smiles.

It had an electrical effect upon Gola. For the first time since he had come over the *Swallow's* rail onto the afterdeck he smiled, disclosing white sound teeth. The somber woodenness of his roughly molded features broke up in a

broad bright smile. Smiling, Gola lost the forbidding air of savagery which had at sight invested him. He seemed quite another person; a really good-natured young man. He inspired confidence in spite of the barbaric effect lent him by his nose ring.

"You gammon some the time," he pointed a finger at Ralph in friendly accusation. "Me no care. Me b'long gammon some the time, too. Me no cannibal. No, sirry. No belong kai-kai anybody. My brother no cannibal. My father. Yes-s-s." He prolonged the "yes" to a reluctant hiss, at the same time making an ashamed gesture. "Me no steal'm nothin'. My word, me honest."

"That'll help some!" Bret exclaimed in a tone of light encouragement. "Now we *are* getting down to brass tacks!"

Gola stared fixedly at Bret for a moment. Bret's round face was very sober, but his eyes were dancing.

"*You* gammon," he triumphantly accused, leveled index finger raised at Bret. "You belong smart; mebbe plenty too smart," he added dubiously.

His frank criticism of mischievous Bret elicited a shout of laughter from the group of adventurers in which Bret joined.

"Oh, very well, dear college chum," Bret pretended reproach. "Go as far as you like. Just wait till you get well acquainted with me.

You'll give that fellah," he nodded mirthfully at Ralph, "the grand go-by. See if you don't."

"No-ee," Gola came back with sudden intense positiveness. "Me belong him." This time his index finger leveled itself at Ralph. "This fellah marster me like good. His father big fellah marster." He jerked his frizzed head toward Malcolm Edwards in a curiously respectful obeisance. "But this fellah," he went back to Ralph again, "my little fellah marster. Belong him."

CHAPTER III

HUNTING FOR "FELLA BROTHER"

"GOOD work! Yours truly! Here's my hand on it, since that's the way you feel. Much obliged game old Guady." Ralph promptly extended his right hand to the islander.

"Belong." Gola returned with apparent satisfaction. He shook hands with Ralph awkwardly, but his grip was strong enough to give Ralph an inkling of the islander's great strength.

"Some strong fella. Belong strong arm, eh, Guady, old sport. Certainly the Edwards's are making a hit with the natives," Ralph commented lightly to his own companions.

"What name, Guady? No belong me. Me Gola," the black man corrected seriously.

"Oh, that's only gammon," Ralph buoyantly assured his new adherent. "I only called you Guady for fun because you came from Guadacanar. Savvee?"

"Me savvee. Me no cross." Gola thus graciously accepted the nickname.

The yachtsmen were secretly amused at the Melanesian's calm air of independence. Later,

they grew to like him immensely for this particular self-respecting trait.

"What happen your brother?" Green broke crisply into Gola's affairs. "Belong sea, what then? You no see him more. We no see him. What you think?"

"Belong sea yet. Him can swim. Feldah, him Malaita chief no catch'm. Canoes far 'way, my brother. We far 'way, too. Mebbe all right. No belong shark, swim sea yet," was Gola's half hopeful opinion.

"A lovely prospect for brother," Bret declared flippantly. Remembering what Gola had said about him, he hastened to add with sincerity: "Here's hoping we sight your brother and pick him up. Let's get busy again with the glasses."

"What name, your brother? How say we hunt for him? Plenty fast sail belong this boat. You no gammon us. We no gammon you. Maybe come alongside your brother. You try harm us, you no can do. You have'm plenty trouble. You no make'm trouble, we help you find your fellas brother," was Green's business-like proposal.

"Belong thank. My brother, Laru. Look like me. Back there." He motioned backward at the sea through which the *Swallow* had come.

"We'll go about, and run up as far as we were when the head hunters started after us," Green proposed to Malcolm Edwards.

"Whatever the commander says goes," the jewel man agreed, smiling.

"Not unless you are back of it," Stanley Green responded with ready loyalty. When Malcolm Edwards and the Adventure Boys had purchased the beautiful yacht on which they had journeyed to the Solomons, Green had been made the commander of the yacht by the unanimous vote of his comrades.

When the adventurers had first viewed their present floating home it had been for sale, the property of an elderly millionaire. By a curious coincidence it bore the name of *Wanderer*, the same name as that of the tramp freighter on which the Adventure Boys had sailed to Africa in quest of diamonds. Their memories of the tramp freighter had not been pleasant, especially to Green. The first thing the adventurers had done, after coming into possession of the yacht at a staggeringly high figure, was to change the yacht's name to the *Swallow*.

"What you, your brother, other strong fellas do when sail'm boat?" Green again proceeded to fresh inquiry.

The sailor was inclined to believe the islander. At the same time he knew the cunning treachery of the Melanesians. They were war-like and predatory when in numbers. Singly, or in small groups, they could exchange ready *bêche-de-mer* patter with white man visitors to their islands to their faces, while their knives waited

a propitious moment to stab the backs of unwary venturers to their shores.

"My word! My brother, me work hard. Catch'm fish every day. Sell'm fellas marster Sanford, that fellas missionary. Dive'm pearls too. That fellas missionary work hard. Hundred fellas work along him. They missionary, too. No more kill, no kai-kai other fellas. Fellas marster Sanford belong talk, talk; good talk, talk; belong prayer. Make'm Guadalcanar fellas do, too. No make'm Malaita fellas do. They belong spears; hunt heads." He made a pass in the air, as though in the act of hacking off a man's head with a cane knife.

"What other fellas work along fellas marster Sanford do?" quizzed Green.

"Fellas work plenty along copra. Dive, too. Catch's *bêche de mer*. Do what fellas marster say do along farm."

"That sounds interesting," Mr. Edwards interposed. "It's exactly like Sanford to start a farm of its kind down here, and put things on a profit-sharing basis with these boys."

"That's probably why his head hasn't gone to ornament the front of a cannibal chief's hut," Green affirmed seriously. "There's a whole lot in a square deal, you know. Still I won't admit that it always pays to handle these islanders very gently. Try to be good to 'em and they have no respect for you, but will down you at the first opportunity. I confess, I'm curious

to learn Sanford's method. I'll say it has worked out well in this particular instance."

"I agree with you." The sailor and the jewel man exchanged significant glances. Mr. Edwards continued with: "We'll do what we can toward trying to pick up this boy's brother. We'll go over the course by which we came. We are too far out for the war canoes. At least they seem far from anxious to try a bout with us."

"My word! Your brother plenty strong fella, belong swim like fish. How long can do? Mebbe come along tired fella pretty quick?" Green again addressed Gola.

"My brother swim plenty like fish; strong fella. No tired quick. Think catch'm my brother fella, this boat go back. Him belong deep water; belong diver." There was an unconscious degree of pleading in Gola's answer.

"All right. We are going back for him." Green straightway hurried to inform Simms of the unexpected change in their sailing program. From the pilot house he climbed up a narrow ladder to an observation post which had been placed at a point on the yacht which commanded a sweeping view of the sea from all sides.

The rest of the group, lately gathered on the afterdeck, had moved to the bow of the boat and were energetically busying themselves with an attempt to pick up the man, Laru, with the aid of the glasses.

As the *Swallow* began to come opposite the distant Malaita shore Green again sent up a sudden echoing shout. Half way between the yacht and the shore he had picked up a black something bobbing upon the water. He thought it might be a frizzy black head; the counterpart of Gola's. He had also picked up something more. At least half a dozen war canoes had put out from shore and were shooting toward the bobbing black object.

From the bow of the *Swallow* a second series of wild shouts was ascending. Gola was dancing up and down on deck howling lustily.

"That fella head belong my fella brother. He make'm swim this boat. Me 'fraid war canoes catch'm quick."

CHAPTER IV

A DESERTED HOUSE

“WHOA, old speedway! Leave us the floor. We may need it to walk on.” Ralph brought a pacific hand down lightly upon Gola’s black shoulder. “Don’t fidget. The canoes aren’t going to catch anything, but a few bullets from us if they put us to it.”

“You belong musket? You fellas fire fellas musket?” Gola’s wild prancing came to an abrupt end. “You no belong missionary. You fellas missionary, you no belong musket,” he argued half disapprovingly.

“You guessed right the first time,” beamed Ralph. “No, dear S. S. S., we are adventurers. Do you know what they are?”

Gola shook his head. “No belong,” he said. His eyes again returned to a worried contemplation of his brother, doughtily breasting the waves, with the renewed menace of being captured by the fierce Malaita tribesmen.

“What does S. S. S. stand for?” Jimmy demanded.

“South Sea Sport, of course.” Ralph’s tone

conveyed derisive surprise at Jimmy's density. "By George!" he cried sharply in the next breath. "Those fiends are coming up on him fast."

"We'll be there before the cannibals to pick him up; but with not many minutes to spare. They're sending those canoes along a lot faster than they paddled 'em this morning," Green informed the watchers. He had come down from his post, temporarily, to give his comrades the benefit of his observations.

"Bz-z-z-t-t! We're zipping along, fellows," Ralph crowed triumphantly. "I'll say we'll pick up Gola's brother and be out of spear or arrow range before you can guess what's stirring."

"Do you think they will try a go at us, Stanley?" was Malcolm Edwards' concerned inquiry.

"No. They won't risk it. The yacht is practically an unknown quantity to them. They know enough about white-man power and the sudden way it works to be afraid of it. They're respectful of the white man's guns, too. Like the African boys they're flivvers with guns. They're crazy about 'em, but are notoriously poor marksmen. Not many Africans can shoot like Dado. Tom Ferris trained him to shoot."

"He's a better shot than Dado. I hate to say it," Ralph admitted with easy reluctance.

Dado was the faithful African youth who had accompanied the Adventure Boys on a diamond expedition to South Africa. The details of their travels over the perilous veldt, which finally led to the finding of the wonderful Valley of Diamonds, for which they had been searching, has already been set down in "The Adventure Boys and the Valley of Diamonds."

The next year the Adventure Boys had started out again on a new jewel trail. This time the hope of a rich jewel prospect had taken them to southern Peru on the trail of emeralds. There in the very heart of the Andes Mountains they had discovered the lost Cavern and River of Emeralds which had been known to the Incas before the coming of the Spaniard, Pizarro, to Peru, and from which had come the world's most flawless emeralds. The story of their good luck as emerald hunters has been recorded in "The Adventure Boys and the River of Emeralds."

Now independently rich as a result of their diamond and emerald expeditions, the Adventure Boys had finally decided to buy the best sea-going yacht they could find for sale with intent to take a trip on it to the South Seas. All of the quintette, Bret Hartson, Jimmy Stone, Stanley Green, Ralph Edwards and his father, Malcolm Edwards, chief of the little expeditionary jewel force of five adventurers, were mildly interested in devoting at least a

part of their time to a hunt for pearls in the blue depths of the South Seas.

Malcolm Edwards was desirous of seeing his old college friend, Richard Sanford again. He had promised the missionary a Victrola, also a large and varied collection of phonograph records which he purposed to deliver in person on the island of Guadalcanar one of the cannibal-infested islands of the southern Pacific, belonging to the Solomon group of islands, northeast of Australia.

Gerald Simms, once antagonistic to the Adventure Boys because of his lack of principle, but, afterward, taught by hardship and suffering to value truth and honorable ways, had been asked by Mr. Edwards to pilot the *Swallow* on her voyage to tropical seas. With two such able seamen as Stanley Green and Gerald Simms on board and also a crew of eight first-rate sailors, a cook and a galley helper, the *Swallow* was thoroughly equipped for the voyage to the tropics. At sun-up one clear balmy morning the *Swallow* had slipped from her moorings and out on the bay, bound for Hawaii, the adventurers' purposed first stop.

It was nearly four months since they had left San Francisco. They had lingered fascinatedly on the Hawaiian Islands charmed by the tropical setting of flowers and song and the friendliness of the natives. They had approached

their objective, the Solomon Islands, in an easy leisurely fashion, and with little excitement other than that which the sight of new and interesting scenes might inspire.

Now that the *Swallow* had at last come near her proposed destination the Adventure Boys were eager to try their hand at pearl gleaning. The *Swallow* boasted two complete diving suits along with the accompanying apparatus necessary to deep-sea diving. The eight sailors were expert at diving and going down to the sea floor in diving suits. Green and Simms were also clever divers. Green, however, pinned his faith partially upon the native divers who could be hired to dive for a comparatively small percentage of their findings.

"Ha-a-a-a-a-a-a! Ah-h-h-h-h-h-h-h!" Both long-drawn-out yells issued from Gola's wide open mouth. It was an outpouring of relief that was filling the morning air. He had discovered that the yacht would beat the war canoes to it.

Coming alongside Gola's brother the yacht slowed down almost to a standstill. Green lowered the same rope ladder over the side which had been the means of landing Gola over the rail and on deck earlier that morning. Laru, the brother, a perfect counterpart of Gola, save that he was a trifle thinner, lost no time in scampering up the ladder to safety.

He and Gola caught each other in a vigorous embrace, chattering their joy at reunion like a couple of monkeys.

Hardly had the rescued black's feet touched the deck when the *Swallow* was off and away from danger. A pandemonium of angry discord broke from the disappointed horde of savages in the canoes as they saw their prey had escaped them. A shower of arrows sprang from the enraged head hunters' bows. The arrows fell short of the *Swallow* by thirty yards, or more, harmlessly cleaving the blue surface of the water, then sinking from sight.

"No spears this trip," Green declared with grim satisfaction. "Those fiends knew they were outclassed; that they didn't have a look-in."

"You win." Bret laughingly nodded from one to the other of the reunited brothers. "You're a lucky pair to have made your get-away."

"Ye-ah." Gola appeared to understand Bret's meaning. He showed white teeth in a grateful smile. Laru, his brother, merely rolled his wild black eyes from one to another of the group of yachtsmen. His entire costume consisted of a leather belt about his waist which bristled with a pair of cane knives, and a bracelet on his left upper arm of small pale opalescent shells. He, too, wore a nose ring, a curious jade ear-ring depending at least three

inches from his left ear. He also sported a tattooed turtle on his broad, sable chest.

"Some class to brother," Ralph commented in mischievous undertones to Jimmy. "He believes more in ornaments than clothes."

"Belong hungry two fella?" Green was again interviewing the yacht's new acquisitions. "How long fella belong Malaita make you belong island, don't give kai-kai?"

"Two fella day no belong kai-kai. Come this morning, belong fella banana. Marys give two fella banana. They hold. We eat," Gola replied. "Belong plenty much hungry."

"All right. You're going to have a better feed than two bananas," Green assured the hungry natives. "I'm going to take these boys to the galley and give 'em a feed, Mr. Edwards."

"Go ahead. After they've had something to eat I wish to quiz Gola about Guadalcanar and my friend Sanford. Now that we are in the midst of a pearlizing prospect we must try to get in touch with Sanford at once. He will be able to give us the best information regarding these islands and the inhabitants. I'm not going to take the risk of landing on any of the Solomons until I have learned a little more about them than I know now," was Malcolm Edwards's view of the matter.

Later, after the rescued islanders had eaten a hearty meal of boiled rice, corned beef hash,

biscuits and hot coffee, the jewel man put the pair through a pleasant, if authoritative, quiz. Laru's vocabulary seemed to consist principally of "Ye-ah" and "No-ah." Gola, however, had incorporated many English words and phrases into the *bêche-de-mer* English which he had originally spoken when he was in the employ of the Reverend Sanford.

"Me, my brother, born on Guadalcanar," he told the jewel man. "We live on coast, belong sea. No go far back in bush. Bush fella belong heathen; kill quick; kai-kai. One fella missionary, that fella Sanford, say plenty time he go back in fella bush, tell'm fella head hunter 'bout God; must do good; no more kai-kai fella they catch'm bush. That fella missionary no go in bush yet. Me tell'm plenty much, that better you fella marster, good fella don't go. You stay, belong coast fella. They belong fish, taro, bananas, bring you presents. No never take'm your head!"

Asked if he could show the pearl prospectors the shortest route to the missionary's house which Sanford had described in one of his letters to Malcolm Edwards as being situated on the south-western shore of Guadalcanar, Gola replied with a positive "Ye-ah," affirmative.

In consequence the islander spent the rest of his first day on board the *Swallow* with Simms at the wheel. He behaved like a pleased child at such a mark of favor, his wide cheerful

smile continually coming and going at the happy task allotted to him by fella marster Edwards.

Simms kept the clean-lined, graceful *Swallow* speeding over the now tranquil tropic sea with the light buoyancy of the feathered flyer from whence came the trim vessel's name.

Before sunset the *Swallow* had rounded the western end of Guadalcanar and was now entirely out of sight of Malaita. That night the adventurers anchored after dark and far enough out from the south-western shore of Guadalecanar to prevent even a likelihood of a night surprise invasion from hostile islanders.

At dawn the *Swallow*'s rail was lined with a row of eager watchers, eyes focussed on the still mist-wreathed shore of Guadalcanar. So far as the adventurers could see through their glasses, there was no sign of persons stirring about, either on shore or on the wide veranda, extending around three sides of a square white frame house, or in the large oblong compound which surrounded the house. It was situated not more than one hundred and fifty yards from the beach where a fairly strong surf broke. To the left of the house was a grove of giant cocoanut palms. The house was in plain sight of the *Swallow*, anchored though she was at a distance of a mile away. A short distance up the beach was a trim white boat house.

Unlike the usual type of cane fence provided

with a low wicker gate, which frequently serves as a compound wall about South Sea plantation houses, the fence about Sanford's compound was of upright logs. On the left and right hand sides of the big log gate rose two tapering flag poles. They were arranged like ships' masts and could be handled in the nautical manner of a ship's halyards. From one of the flag poles, both of which rose to a height of fifteen feet, floated an English flag. From the other fluttered gallantly the Stars and Stripes.

"Where is everybody? 'Who belong that fellah missionary?'" Ralph exclaimed impatiently after a prolonged survey through glasses of the apparently deserted comfortable-looking white plantation house. "We'd surely know it by now if Sanford had picked up our hails and our wig-wagging." Simms had already shouted friendly hails through a megaphone. Green and one of the sailors, John Phelps, had just finished a vigorous bit of wig-wagging.

"There's something not right over yonder." Green had dropped his wig-wag flags and grown again busy with his glasses. "Not a blamed thing stirring. I can see the tops of two or three little wooden shacks, and the tops of a few grass huts. What I can't pick up is sign of a human being. Not even a pickaninny, rolling around in the sand."

"Then it's up to us to chase ourselves ashore, pronto, and find out what's hap-

pened," was Ralph's instant valorous proposal. "Maybe there's been an uprising among Sanford's reformed head hunters. They may have carted him off into the bush as a-a—well, I hope, a prisoner." Ralph stopped, reluctant to give his worried apprehension further utterance. "Maybe, he's got sick and died, and the savages have gone back to the bush again," he added as an afterthought.

"We must go on shore and search for Sanford," was the jewel man's resolute plan. "It's good business to sail away from danger—sometimes. But not this time. How close to the beach do you believe we can go, Stanley? You took soundings last night. It doesn't look promising to me, though."

"It isn't," Green replied. "There is too much treacherous shoal water between here and that strip of beach in front of the house. Notice how the surf breaks upon the beach. It's high and rough even for such a still hot day as this."

"How far out are we?" Bret had not yet become proficient at gauging distances at sea.

"About half a mile, possibly three-quarters. We can't run the *Swallow* much closer; say not more than three hundred yards. We'll take the whaleboat in the rest of the way."

"O-w-w-w-! O-w-w-w-w-w-w-w! Ai-i-i-i-i-i!" From somewhere above them a series of shrill yells, prolonged by many "ows" burst sharply

upon the ears of the adventurers, engrossed in anxious consultation. A lithe black shape bounced into their midst with a leopard-like spring. A fresh series of yells began, accompanied by a frenzied flapping of a pair of muscular black arms. Something was certainly the matter with Gola.

CHAPTER V

"MAKE YOURSELVES AT HOME"

"**G**REAT Guns! What's broken out? Put on the brake, dear S. S. S. You'll live longer and wear better." Ralph gave Gola the waggish counsel with an indulgent grin.

Green, however, brought a hand down on the bare black shoulder of the flustered islander with gentle force.

"I say you fellas belong Guadalcanar, you make'm plenty too much noise. I no cross, only we no like hear such big noise. My word! What matter with you?" Green spoke with intent to calm Gola's agitation. He could only surmise that Gola had drawn his own conclusions at sight of the seemingly deserted mission house.

"B'long head hunters! B'long bush fella!" Gola wailed. He broke into a kind of wild sob. "Fella marster Sanford no there." He pointed tragically toward the house. "Fella marster Sanford no any place his house. Plenty time fella marster say, 'Bime bye mus' go along see bush fella in middle fella island." One chief

there, that name, Bodoma, very big killer. He live middle Guadalcanar. Sometime come along beach. His bush fella no come along beach. Beach fella go in bush no come back bime bye. No come back more. Bodoma catch'm plenty fella heads."

"A foxy old chief. Sanford once wrote me about him. Until a matter of ten years ago no white man had ever set foot in the middle of the island of Guadalcanar," Malcolm Edwards interpolated this bit of information into Gola's lamentations. "This same chief, Bodoma, was living near the center of the island then. The beach fellas were terribly afraid of him and his fellas. No one ever saw one of Bodoma's fellas except the poor boys who suddenly disappeared if they happened to wander beyond a certain limit in the bush. In that very letter Sanford wrote me that he hoped some day to Christianize Bodoma. He had then had one encounter with him on the beach.

"Huh-h-h-h! My word, never," Gola interrupted with unbelieving scorn. He had understood most of Malcolm Edwards' remarks about Bodoma. "Me stop along fella marster Sanford, long long time. Some Guadalcanar fella belong on beach, belong good. No hunt heads. Make missionary. This kind belong my brother. Belong me. No belong Bodoma."

"Are only the beach fellas the missionaries?"

Jimmy asked half amused at the idea of the converted islander styling himself and his reformed tribesmen as "missionaries."

"Some fella belong bush little way in, belong missionary. Then come along out of bush, belong beach. Fella way back along bush, no come out. Stay in bush. Catch'm heads. Catch'm any fella, kai-kai."

"You savvee this fella, Bodoma?" Green asked the islander.

"Me savvee like this." Gola pointed to his ears and eyes. "He no talk talk, me. But hear that fella cannibal talk talk along fella marster Sanford. Talk, talk nice; plenty 'Merican talk talk. He learn— Me no savvee how. He come along from bush once in while. Bring plenty bananas, pine-apples, taro, cocoanuts. His fella bring, then run back along bush. He tell my fella marster he want belong missionary. Ask fella marster Sanford tell'm how can do be missionary. Ask him come along bush; see his house. Say he give fella work along my fella marster plenty present. Give gold, pearls; make'm rich."

"What your fella brother, fella boys think Bodoma?" was Green's pertinent question. "I ask you, what think? Maybe Bodoma want belong missionary. Maybe belong truth."

"Ha-a-a-a-a-a." Gola received this view of Bodoma's acts of contrition for past evil ways with scornful derision. "Bodoma no good. No

want belong truth. All gammon. I ask you, you savvee what Bodoma want."

"Well, what does he want?" Ralph cut in a trifle impatiently. He was anxious to end all preliminary discussion and set foot on the white sunlit beach of Guadalcanar which held the height of adventure for him.

"Bodoma want kill my fella marster, then kai-kai. Catch'm allee fellas work along farm. Take'm along middle of island. Ever li'l while make'm big feast. Kai-kai one, two, three, mebbe four fella missionary. Bime bye no more fella missionary. Then come along Bodoma live along fella marster Sanford's house." Gola paused impressively. "He gammon; play him good fella trader. Trade pearls, copra, fish, many other thing. White fella come along boats. Stop along trade with Bodoma. Go along in that house. No come along out. Bodoma much smart fella. He belong lies. Tell fella friends, they come along hunt trader he kill. 'Me sorry. Your fella friend go along bush. No see for long time.' "

"A cunning rascal," Edwards commented, frowning. Listening to Gola's scathing description of Bodoma, the Guadalcanar terror, the jewel hunter was more than ever convinced of the black man's trustworthiness. Several times since the latter's unexpected arrival on board the *Swallow* he had wondered if, perhaps, Gola might not have been sent out by a

cunning Malaita chief to challenge the attention of the yachtsmen, and pick up information regarding their presence in the Solomons. He knew from Green that the war-ready Solomon Island blacks were versed in trickery. They were naturally treacherous and had been made even more tricky by their dealings with beach-combers and low-class white men.

"What's our best plan, boys?" Malcolm Edwards finally put to his companions. "I'd say it would be wise to hang off here a while until we are sure there is no one hidden in the house or about the compound. On the other hand, Sanford may be a prisoner in one of the rooms of his own house, and situated so as to be unable to signal or call for help. He may be in desperate need of it."

"It's up to us to go ashore as soon as we can," Green advocated. "In such an uncertainty, we must act on the basis that, if we hurry, we may get to Sanford's house in time to prevent a killing."

"We'll stop long enough for breakfast. If we have to fight cannibals we'll fight better on full stomachs," Mr. Edwards decided.

"I'll send Elmer to relieve Simms at the wheel. We want Simms to understand exactly what we are going to do. He will have to stay on board, though. He's your best bet, if the canabs get me," Green said lightly.

"'Nuff said. I can't risk both my pilot and

commander at one swoop," Mr. Edwards demurred.

Green disappeared for the moment on his errand. Savory odors from the galley drifted to the noses of the hungry adventurers, announcing eloquently that breakfast was ready. A very genial sextette of yachtmen were soon busy with a hearty meal of fried ham and eggs, sliced bananas with cream and corn pancakes which Wally, the *Swallow's* cook could stir up to perfection.

The rescue, or investigating party, as the case might prove to be, burned no daylight in getting ready to go ashore after breakfast. Simms promptly got under way, steaming beachward steadily, though stopping two or three times to take soundings.

Green's accurate guess that treacherous shoals would prevent the *Swallow* from anchoring closer in to shore than an eighth of a mile was soon verified by Simms's sounding which he ordered Elmer to take.

Presently the yacht's whaleboat, which the Adventure Boys had named *Sea Nymph*, was floating free alongside the *Swallow*. It was a staunch little craft. Green had planned and afterward superintended its construction. In consequence it was equipped with a sturdiness of timber calculated to carry it through heavy seas.

The shore party were not only armed with

revolvers, they carried their rifles, too, with enough rounds of ammunition to enable them to give good account of themselves should occasion for defense arise.

Stanley Green took his place in the stern at the steering sweep. There were six other sweeps besides. Mr. Edwards and Ralph, Bret and Jimmy, one of the sailors, Fred Hall and Gola, manned the six sweeps. It had been decided prudent to increase the shore party by at least two men. This left almost as many men on board the *Swallow* as were with the little expedition to the beach, though the *Swallow's* electrified rail made it a comparatively safe haven against attack.

"What kind of navigation do you think you're pulling off?" Ralph laughingly demanded of Green. When within a hundred feet of the beach, the sailor-commander suddenly brought the *Sea Nymph* about until the whale-boat was headed into shore, stern first.

"Safety first," was the amused reply. "Let me tell you something, Boy. When you are getting ready to land on a cannibal coast, never go in, bow-first. Stern first is your watchword, every time. Run your boat in stern first so that you can back out in a hurry if things begin to get zippy."

"Betcha I will. What you say goes, Admiral," Ralph made buoyant reply.

A few more sweeps of the long oars sent the

Sea Nymph rushing along through the slightly ruffling sea as though endowed with a life all its own. The swing of strong arms fairly flung the whaleboat upon the beach. Next instant the rowers had sprung out of it and were dragging it further up the beach.

"Jimmy and Hall, I wish you two would stay here and keep an eye on the whaleboat," Green directed. "You'll have to keep your eyes busy in all directions at once. I don't like to leave the *Nymph* to take care of herself. If some one were to nab her it would be a case of a tough swim through shoal water to the *Swallow*. But get this, fellows. If you see a gang of islanders coming your way, jump into the whaleboat and pull like sixty for the yacht. Never mind waiting for us. You can beat even war canoes to the ship if you get a quick start."

"O. K. unless we happen to see a gang of head hunters chasing you from up there down to the *Sea Nymph*. Never think we'll do anything except wait for you then," Jimmy said loyally.

"There's no telling what we may find. Well, suppose we go to it." Malcolm Edwards resolutely faced toward the white house which boasted two stories, rising above the nine-foot log fence with a curious air of independence.

With one accord the company that were told-off to seek admittance to the missionary's attractive home started briskly up the gentle

slope of the beach. Each man walked with his rifle strictly at ready to be fired at need.

Arrived at the compound gate, situated at the left-hand side of the log fence, they found it closed and unlocked. Ralph, placing one shoulder against the log gate, and giving it a vigorous shove inward, was all but carried off his feet by the impetus of the swinging gate.

"Hey! Can you beat that?" Ralph was waving an excited hand toward a square piece of white cardboard neatly tacked to the inside of the gate. It was the first object on which his eyes had lighted as he made his violent entrance into the compound.

"What is it?" Bret asked breathlessly, coming up beside Ralph.

"Look. We should worry about our fellah missionary." He pointed to the bit of cardboard, upon which stood out several short sentences in vivid black lettering. Then he read gaily aloud:

"Come in. Make yourselves at home. This means you, Malcolm, and your boys. Will return soon from the bush. Sanford.' "

CHAPTER VI

ONE SURPRISE AFTER ANOTHER

"WHAT is?" Gola demanded, jerking his frizzy head toward the message tacked to the gate. "What say, I ask you?"

"Your fella marster has taken a hike into the bush, Gola. He says he'll be back soon. This fella message he write. Put here, stop along fence we com'n find," Ralph explained to the islander.

"Mebbe come back. Mebbe Bodoma no kill'm yet," was Gola's pessimistic view of things. "Bodoma savvee white men come along Guad-alcanar, see fella marster Sanford, mebbe no want kill, kai-kai now. Bodoma think wait I'il while, Kai-kai my fella marster bime bye."

"You surely do have a poor opinion of old Bodoma," Bret said with an amused grin.

"No old. Bodoma no old. He belong forty year, mebbe. Big fella. My word, him strong! Knock what name outa any fella. He bad fella, no belong smile, allee time cross. This no good. He feel cross, better no show cross. This no missionary. Plenty smile when he get ready

stick'm knife along back. Bodoma big killer."

"A dangerous proposition." Mr. Edwards had taken the cardboard message from the gate. He rolled it up and placed it in a trousers pocket. "It was for us," he said, "and it has now served its purpose. It seems strange to me that none of Sanford's men are about the place. He doesn't mention them in his message to us. There are both frame and grass huts a little way beyond here, and directly back of the compound. There must be women and children in some of them. *They* surely haven't gone on any bush expeditions."

"How many Marys live along fella marster's farm, belong Guadalcanar beach fella wife?" Green inquired of the islander.

"No many. Most fella plenty young like me. No belong fella wife fella Mary yet. No want fella wife. Mebbe belong fella wife bime bye."

With eyes alertly trained to miss nothing as they went the adventurers followed a wide dirt path, packed hard from the passing of many feet, which led centrally up the slightly sloping front yard to the house.

The large lawn enclosed by the log fence caused the faces of the newcomers to brighten into warm admiration for the untiring industry of the man who had endeavored to make a Paradise of his lonely home on the beach of a cannibal island. Not only had he planted in his yard the flowers indigenous to the South

Seas. There were borders of tall, gorgeously colored phlox, scarlet sage and wonderful flowering begonias as tall as six feet. There were round and oval beds of brilliant-hued verbenas, zinnias, fragrant heliotrope and other free blooming colorful plants.

"Sanford has brought home down here with him." Malcolm Edwards' pleased tones registered his deep admiration of the energetic missionary.

"He's what you call an up-and-comer, all right enough," Green added his admiring opinion.

"Let's go into the house. The fella marster wrote, 'Make yourselves at home.' That's us." Ralph was impatient to go on with the adventure.

The party of five had come to a standstill about halfway up the path to take appreciative stock of their colorful surroundings. Gola alone was paying small attention to the missionary's decorative yard. He was keeping up a bright look-out at a spot not far to the east of the compound on which stood a good-sized low copra shed, surrounded by open ranks of giant cocoanut palms.

As the adventurers resumed their walk in time to Ralph's impatient plea, Gola pointed toward the low shed. "Me go along copra shed," he volunteered. He began walking toward it as he spoke. "Me no gammon," he

loyally assured, over one shoulder. "See what fella do before go along bush along my fella marster."

"Wait a minute." Green halted Gola. "You think fella boys run along bush along fella Marster Sanford, Gola?" he questioned. "That plenty fella, too much fella, mebbe ten fella, ten times, go along. My word, too much fella!" Green made a skeptical gesture. "I ask, why Guadalcanar fella no stay here, mebbe ten fella, watch'm Mary and little Mary, little fella? Mebbe come war canoe from Malaita. Catch'm Mary. Catch'm little fella Mary. No see more. Fella brute Malaita kai-kai."

"You speak truth. Fella Mary no much good," he added stolidly. "Too much talk talk, too much cry. But fella marster Sanford say must treat kind. No knock'm down, no give'm strong fella whip. He tell'm mission boy, Marys allee same good fella, belong God, same fella mission boy."

"Sanford's certainly done a lot of good in this heathen dump," was Ralph's approving cry. "He's a live wire, that man."

"Down among these islands women are no more than the dust under these savages' feet. They don't even respect their own mothers," Green commented. "Go ahead, Gola." He gave the black man the longed-for permission to go. Gola darted away without a word.

"Might as well let him poke around the big

grove and the copra shed. He's straight. Shall we go into the house?"

The four explorers mounted the fairly wide flight of steps leading up to the veranda. It was a roomy veranda, furnished with bamboo lounging rockers and a deep settee as well as a comfortable hammock. Contrary to the flowery beauty of the yard, not a wisp of decorative green showed on either the veranda or railing. The veranda on all three sides commanded a sweeping view of the beach and the ocean.

The front door was closed.

"I'll say it's too much like nerve to go walking into a strange house this way," Ralph joked as the group paused in front of the door.

"Here goes, I'm not keen about it, either, even if it is my old pal's house." Mr. Edwards paused, smiling, his hand on the door knob. Then he turned the knob and gently swung open the door.

The party found themselves in a large living room which extended straight across the front of the house. It was plainly but comfortably furnished with cretonne covered bamboo easy chairs, a lounge and several willow and wicker tables. At one side stood a little organ, the top part of which was piled with sheet music and music books. There were several large pictures on the wall of appropriate religious subjects, besides a number of neatly framed nature studies in bright colors. There were

crisp white ruffled curtains at the windows and a blue and white Japanese matting rug on the floor. It was plainly a living room furnished with an eye to comfort and use rather than ornamentation.

What caught the attention immediately of the party of men from the *Swallow* was a sealed envelope which lay in the middle of a cleared space at one end of the bamboo center table.

"Look, Dad, it's addressed to you." Ralph was first at the table. He caught up the envelope and tendered it to his father.

Mr. Edwards tore it open hurriedly and drew out the folded letter. Immediately he read to his surprised and much interested companions:

"Dear Edwards:

"Am so sorry to be called away on the very eve of your long-looked for visit to me, but I must go where duty calls. You may recall Bodoma, the Guadalcanar chief about whom I wrote you. That was years ago. Ever since then I have been trying to convert him to Christianity. Matters are still very bad on these islands regarding cannibalism. Bodoma has great influence with the bushmen here who stick to the wild middle section of the island and are head hunters and cannibals in the extreme sense of the word. For a long time he has called himself a Christian and has assured

me repeatedly that he will neither head hunt nor eat human flesh ever again as long as he may live. A number of his men are of the same persuasion. My beach boys take no stock in Bodoma's vows, or those of his fellows. They insist that he is only awaiting a good opportunity to attack the mission and murder us all.

"Well, it is my calling to accept any and every man as honest until he shall prove himself a villain. Bodoma has come to take me with him to his hut in the bush. I have told him I am expecting visitors from a ship and that I must return from such a visit on the fifth day after starting for his hut. He says it will take us only a few hours to go there. He has promised me a safe conduct, there and back.

"I am provoked, and at the same time amused at my 'work fellas.' When I told them this morning that I was going to make Bodoma a visit, they all decided to take a holiday and go with me. Nothing I could say served to change their plan. Bodoma merely laughed when I told him of this, and said they were plenty too much fool. I shall have a bodyguard of about fifty men. The others, at present, are away, farther down the beach, pearl diving.

"I am hoping that I shall return before you arrive. In case you arrive at the mission ahead of me, make yourselves strictly at home. You

will find plenty of fresh vegetables in the kitchen garden and can forage about the place for bananas, pineapples and cocoanuts. Aloa, the wife of one of my boys, will come to the house each morning with milk and fresh eggs. She will also cook for you unless you prefer to do your own cooking. My house boys insist on going with me.

"If you have come from the yacht in a dinghy or whaleboat, better haul it up and into the boathouse at the right-hand side of the beach. You can padlock it there and it will be safe indefinitely. My own fellows are to be trusted, but strays on the beach are not uncommon, and we usually find such visitors are out for plunder. I have detailed twelve of my men to remain about the place as a safeguard to the women and children.

"Trusting that I shall return in time to receive you. In any event it will be only a few days until we shall meet and renew old friendship. Remember the mission is yours. Live in it. The key to the boathouse is in the right-hand second drawer of my desk.

"Your sincere comrade,

RICHARD SANFORD."

"What's the date of that letter?" Ralph asked.

"September tenth."

"That's six days ago, and he's still among

the missing," Bret said. "He wrote that he'd be back on the fifth day."

"He's due to blow in here before long," surmised Green. "Since his gang of fellows have gone along to take care of him, he's safe enough."

"Bodoma may be putting up a square deal," Ralph argued reflectively. "He may not be as bad as Gola paints him."

Green shook his head. "He is a man-eater. Gola knows. So does that gang of tame Guad-alcanar tigers that have gone along with Sanford. You can see what a power *he* is among his followers. White-man power again. They couldn't keep him from going into the bush with Bodoma. So they did the next best thing. They tagged along."

From the living room the four men passed into a small adjoining room which Sanford evidently used as a library. Three sides of the little apartment were lined to the ceiling with well-filled book shelves. On the fourth side was a business-like flat-topped desk and a four-drawer office file as well as a small typewriting machine, placed on one end of the desk. A row of black covered, red-cornered account books piled at the back of the desk gave further evidence of the industry of the "up-and-coming fella marster" of the mission.

The little library and office opened also into a short hall. On the opposite side of the hall

was a dining-room and back of the library and dining-room was a good-sized kitchen. Up stairs the guests found three good-sized airy sleeping rooms. Greatly to their surprise they also found a bathroom with modern conveniences. There were awnings on the upstairs windows and the veranda was screened on all three sides to keep out pestiferous insects.

Presently they returned from their tour of the second floor of the house to the kitchen and from there went out onto the compound by means of the back door. They came directly upon the kitchen garden, mentioned by Sanford in his letter. Onions, salad, taro, corn and tomatoes flourished there. A patch of ripening cantaloupes spread invitingly in the sun along with the dark green of citrons. At the left-hand side of the compound was a row of well-grown pecan trees, loaded with green nuts.

"Some place," was Green's hearty praise of the mission house as they finally let themselves out by the heavy back gate of the compound and stepped into a small grove of young cocoanut palms, quite apart from the large grove at the left of the house.

Beyond the little grove were the one-story shacks and grass huts of the "fellas." The shacks were trim little affairs, painted in light attractive blues, greens and yellows. In front of several of them solemn-faced pickaninnies

ran or toddled about, according to size and age. Here and there a shy-faced native woman peeped at the strangers from behind the screen of a grass-woven door curtain.

They continued their interested tour of the missionary's colony, more and more impressed by the wonders which the Reverend Richard Sanford had accomplished in the way of civilization on one of the most debatable islands of the Melanesian Archipelago.

In the midst of their tour Gola suddenly rose up at them out of a patch of long grass like a black Jack-in-the-box.

"Jerusalem crickets! Why didn't you sound a horn?" Ralph exclaimed, half startled by the sudden appearance of the sable apparition.

"That way bush fella come along quick. You no see, cut'm off you head in minute." Gola explained with stress.

"I see. How about it, old trouble-crier? How is every little thing along this place?" he demanded jocosely of Gola.

"No see nothin' bad. No bush fella hang'm along this place. Plenty copra drying along shed. Mebbe allee fella missionary go along bush fella marster. No savee." He seemed perplexed over the complete absence of blacks from the mission. No good allee fella go 'way," he ended darkly.

"Buck up, Guady. Let me hand you some cheerful dope." Ralph proceeded to inform

the gloomy islander of the contents of Richard Sanford's letter.

Gola brightened at the reassuring news. Next instant his heavy features fell. "Where is?" he demanded: "I ask you where is twelve fella watch along place. Me no see no fella. That plenty queer."

"Where do you think they are, Gola?" Mr. Edwards cut in tersely. "I'll say you know."

"Yes-s-s. These twelve fella go along after fella marster in bush. Keep quiet. No want fella marster know. They keep along behind. No want catch'm up. They catch'm up, fella marster make'm go along mission."

"What's the big idea, I wonder?" Ralph said curiously.

"Me savvee." Rather to his surprise Gola had understood his ironic question. "Twelve fella take along spears, knives, mebbe guns for other missionary boy. They think mebbe need'm plenty quick. Mebbe have fight with bush fella. Bodoma try kill'm fella marster, then missionary boy have spears, guns and knives. Can fight'm bush fella hard. Now me go talk, talk one Mary, fella wife, Monga good missionary, but big fighter. Me find out what is. See you bime bye."

Gola turned and was off, a black flash, darting this way and that, through the tall grass as he headed for the colony of huts.

"If the twelve boys who are supposed to be

doing guard duty don't appear it will be up to us to take their detail," was the jewel man's rather grim declaration. "I intended to propose going back to the yacht to-night. It looks to me as though we might have a blow. In that case we'd be needed, to a man, on the *Swallow*. I shouldn't care to have Simms bear the brunt of one of these tropical storms. They say such blows are little short of hurricanes at times."

Discussing the situation as they went the four men returned through the rear entrance of the compound, bolting the heavy gate after them. They retraced their steps into the house and went into the living room again.

"We had best go down to the beach and wig-wag a message to Simms that we have landed O.K. and found everything quiet," Stanley Green advised. "I'll signal him to send two of the crew for me in the dinghy. It's best to leave the *Sea Nymph* here for you fellows. You might want to go back to ship in a hurry."

"Where do you think you're going?" was Ralph's humorously suggestive question.

"Give me time, and I'll tell you," Green retorted, with a smile. "I'm going back to the *Swallow*. There's a big blow on the way to us. I've been getting indications of it for the past two days. In case of a bad storm I'll be of more use on the *Swallow* than here. Simms will need me more than you fellows will. What you had better do is haul up the whaleboat, put

it in the boathouse and padlock it in there. That will release Stone and Hall. Then they can join your gang."

"A good plan, Stanley. Only I need you here," Mr. Edwards demurred. "You understand these savages so much better than we savvee them. You're point about leaving Simms alone on the *Swallow* to cope with the kind of tropical storm that's common to these islands is too sound to disregard. We'll go down to the beach now and haul up the *Sea Nymph*."

The jewel man promptly started for the veranda, followed by his three companions. The moment he set foot on the veranda his gaze traveled to the point on the beach where the *Sea Nymph* lay.

"Ah-h-h-h!" He raised his voice in a ringing shout, cleared the steps of the veranda at one long leap and began running for the *Sea Nymph* with long strides. In the same instant his comrades had echoed the wild shout and were tearing across the beach at his heels.

CHAPTER VII

A BRUSH WITH THE BUSH FELLAS

“**C**RACK, crack, crack!” The repeated sharp reports of rifle fire came from the *Sea Nymph*. Crouched low in the whaleboat Jimmy and Hall were valiantly defending themselves against a knot of black-skinned, fierce-faced savages armed with spears and long gleaming knives.

On the beach not more than half a dozen yards from the *Sea Nymph* two high-bowed, shell decorated war canoes had been moored. The canoes were empty now. Their frizzy-headed, naked, tattooed occupants, however, were making a hasty scrambling retreat toward their own boats. One big black fellow already lay motionless on the sand, face downward. Another was dancing and howling with the pain of a shattered wrist. Jimmy and Hall had defended themselves to good purpose.

The savage now dead on the sands had hurled a spear at Jimmy, missing him by less than half an inch. It had whizzed past his left shoulder and struck harmlessly in the sea. The other savage had been put out of spear prac-

tice at the very instant he had balanced his long spear for a cast at Hall.

It had needed but the sound of shouting from the mission house and the appearance of white men on the warpath to send the marauding cannibals back to their canoes in a hurry. By the time the four runners had reached the *Sea Nymph* and her valiant little crew, the black fellows were back in their boats and pushing off from shore. They had snatched up the body of the dead cannibal and hustled the lifeless form into one of their canoes.

"Let 'em have just one volley," shouted Stanley Green. "Aim to miss 'em, but make it a close call." As he called out he brought his rifle to his shoulder. "Right-o. Hand it to 'em, the treacherous brutes! Give 'em three rounds!"

Six rifles spoke together. Six bullets hummed unpleasantly near the chattering, yelling savages as they paddled for dear life to escape the white man's fire. A third installment of bullets, even closer than a second, though the war party was steadily drawing away from that deadly shore, sent some of the cannibals leaping into the water in a frenzy of fear.

"That'll be about all for those man-eaters," was Jimmy's grimly satisfied comment, as he finally swung his rifle from his shoulder and sat down on one of the whaleboat's seats. "The queer part of it is we never saw the two canoes

coming until they showed themselves up there."

"There's a curve in the beach up farther. I noticed it from the yacht. The blamed cannibals have hugged the beach and kept the canoes out of sight. The curve gave 'em a good chance to come up on us, unawares." Ralph offered this explanation.

"They're certainly not bothering about curves now," Green was taking speculative stock of the rapidly paddling war canoes. "They're hitting it up for the tall timbers. Wherever they may be. I'm wondering if those head hunters are from the Guadalecanar coast, either north or south of here, or if they're from another of the Solomons."

"Maybe they are bushmen. Maybe Bodoma sent 'em to see what they could see," Bret suggested.

"I don't believe they are bush fellows." Green shook his head meditatively. "I've heard that the real bushmen never come down to the beach. You know Gola said that, too."

"Maybe these fellows are out after Gola," Bret next surmised. "The Malaita head hunters who had him tied up may suspect he has landed on Guadalecanar. They may suspect Sanford is sheltering him and have sent a war party to find out what was doing."

"I shouldn't be surprised if you had the right dope about it, Hartson," Ralph said. "Those canoes are going toward Malaita. That's a

cinch. They've a good long trip ahead of 'em, too. Not to mention the blow that's coming. They'll have to go some to land on Malaita before she blows." He cast half apprehensive eyes up at the sky. Lately a cerulean arch, the sky had changed to blue-gray with curious fog patches of still deeper gray appearing here and there on the blue-gray field.

"The wind has freshened a good deal in the last hour." Malcolm Edwards held out a hand to test the strength and velocity of the wind. "Let's put the whaleboat in the boathouse at once, boys. Go ahead, pronto, with your message to Simms, Stanley. Since you must go back to the *Swallow* try to get the dinghy here soon. I'd hate to see you out in it with the sea rough."

"Yes, I guess so. There's a pretty strong surf here as it is. Betcha the big combers come tumbling in when the wind's high. We shan't take any chances of losing our commander." There was a serious ring to Ralph's light speech.

"Oh, shucks!" Green deprecated, flushing under his tan. "You couldn't lose me if you tried." Going over to the *Sea Nymph* he stepped in it, then stooped for the little bundle of wig-wag flags he had brought with him from the *Swallow*.

Getting in touch with Simms was an easy task. The pilot was on the watch for signals. He

had been below when the canoes had appeared and had rushed on deck at Elmer's alarmed call to him through the speaking tube. He had been anxiously alert since then. Like Green he had sailed the South Seas before this voyage and therefore cherished no trustful regard for the natives.

Presently the dinghy, rowed by Simms and Elmer, shot out from the *Swallow's* side and went skimming across the roughening sea toward the strip of beach for Green.

Meanwhile the sky was steadily growing grayer. Wisps of fog gathered here and there on the gray expanse of sky. Sometimes they united to form cloud banks which raced along as though endowed with sudden life, forming in strange, fantastic shapes, as they drifted across the lowering sky.

The sea no longer dimpled in pleasant little wavelets. There was a steady wash on the beach now of white-capped breakers. They seemed to grow larger as they continued to break high upon the sand in foaming unending succession.

"Here's the key." Ralph tossed the brass boathouse key into the air, catching it lightly in his extended hands. He had found it as per Sanford's direction in the right-hand second drawer of the missionary's desk and had pocketed it accordingly. He now deftly in-

serted it in the stout padlock used in making fast the double doors. It sprang open at a touch. Next instant he had swung in the white-painted doors, revealing the interior of the little shack. It was large enough to hold two ordinary-sized boats. Instead, it was bare of craft of any description.

"Sanford must have some kind of boat," Mr. Edwards said after a quick survey of the empty boathouse. "Very likely the pearl gang has it. There is plenty of room here for the *Sea Nymph*. We could run her out of here and into the surf easily in emergency."

Six pairs of willing arms lent their strength to lugging the *Sea Nymph* into her temporary new quarters. She was small size for a whale-boat, and consequently not so heavy as the average boat of her type. For sea-worthy qualities she could not be surpassed. Next to the *Swallow*, she was the pride of Stanley Green's heart, since he had been largely concerned in the *Sea Nymph's* construction.

"Some fracas you just had," were Simms' first excited words as he ran the dinghy's nose into the white sand and sprang from it. "By George, those two canoes came up like magic! I watched you fellows ashore and then went down to the cabin for a while. Next thing I knew Elmer had me on the speaking tube telling me to come up on deck. By the time we were ready to take a shot at the confounded head

hunters Hall and Stone had chased them off and they were making a hurry-up get-away."

"Where do you believe they blew from, Simms?" Bret quizzed.

"Hard to say. Maybe they put out from shore; from some point along that particular in-curve. Maybe they are some of the fellows from that gang of head hunters who chased us yesterday. I have an idea they are. What's stirring up at the mission house? I know Sanford's not there, or he'd be down here with you."

"He's gone off on an expedition into the bush. I'll tell you about it on the way back to ship. I'm going back with you. We'll have to pull off for the *Swallow*, pronto. This wind isn't doing a thing to the sea, but whipping it up in great shape. Soon it will be running too high for the dinghy. Look at that." Green waved an arm toward the bottle-green, foam-crested breakers, piling up, one behind another, each waving seemingly rougher and higher than the preceding one.

"I'm ready." Simms was back in the dinghy again in a flash. Elmer had not stepped out of it. Green gave the rowboat a forceful shove and leaped into it as it floated free.

"So long," he called farewell to the group on the beach. "Trust us to look after the *Swallow* and keep her ship-shape. It'll take more than one blow to down her. We'll run off

a little into deeper water. If you want to send me a message, get Hall to wig-wag it. I'll come over late this afternoon if it clears up. If not, you may expect me on shore early tomorrow morning. Good-bye."

CHAPTER VIII

TWO KINDS OF STORM

A CHORUS of farewells followed Green as the dinghy shot gallantly forward into the foaming surf. She was in the hands of three capable sailors. In spite of the high-running sea the short row to the *Swallow* was accomplished without mishap. Soon the trio of seamen were back on deck signaling their safe arrival to their comrades on the beach.

With the continued freshening of the wind the watchers of the dinghy had moved backward up the beach a little at a time. The wash was coming further in shore with every wave that broke on the sands.

"This beach will be covered with water in another hour," Ralph shouted to his father. "Betcha, if the wind keeps up, the waves will hit the flag poles. Great guns! Watch that big comber away out there. It's a mile long, if it's a yard. The *Swallow*'s right in line for it, too."

"There are plenty more big ones back of that one, too. Do you suppose?"—Bret began apprehensively—"one of those mountains of water could wreck the *Swallow*?"

"It could, but let's hope it won't. Green says she can hold her own in most kinds of weather," Ralph answered. "But," he shrugged his shoulders, "the sea is the great unknown, the world's great mystery. That's just why I don't like old ocean. That's the great drawback to the pearl-hunting game—having to dive to the bottom of the sea for pearls. Still it isn't any riskier than the rest of the jewel-hunting game."

"I'm crazy to go down to the bottom in a diving suit," Bret returned eagerly. "It'll be the great day of my life when it happens. Only I hope I don't bump into a shark, first thing. No wonder diamonds, pearls, emeralds and rubies cost money. They cost man-power first of all. Look at the dangers a fellow has to meet in order to find them."

A gust of wind, sudden and spiteful, swept down upon the adventurers, still engaged in watching the *Swallow's* sturdy tactics. The force of the blast nearly blew them off their feet.

"Gee whiz!" yelled Bret as he made a forward lunge for his light cloth cap which the furious blast had snatched from his head. "The beach is no place for us in this gale. Next blast—good night! It'll be into the briny for ours." He began running toward the mission house, calling: "Come along before the wind takes your breath and a comber gets you."

A second, fiercer gust of wind sent the others

scurrying in Bret's wake. The blow had begun in earnest. The wind raved and shrieked through the trees like a mad thing. Above the thunder of the waves, pounding upon the sands, rose the hissing of hundreds of wavelets, breaking foaming upon the beach.

As they ran for the house, buffeting the fury of the gale, they could hear the tall, slim-trunked cocoanut trees in the adjacent grove snapping like pipe-stems, and, mingling with the sharp cracking sounds the heavy thud of falling cocoanuts. The force with which they were dropping was sufficient to crush a man's head, should he be unlucky enough to come within the dropping radius of one of the tough-shelled, heavy nuts.

Before they reached the veranda the rain came. They were caught in a veritable deluge. The water poured down upon them in a great sheet, drenching them all in a moment and almost robbing them of breath. They had only a matter of a few yards to go in order to reach the shelter of the mission house. Nevertheless, they arrived on the veranda, their clothing running rivulets, a thoroughly bedraggled set of adventurers.

It was not yet noon, but it might have been early twilight so great was the gloom cast by the lowering skies and the torrential rain. The yachtsmen paused on the veranda, drenched

though they were, to try to make out the *Swallow* through the rain-darkened landscape and foaming sea. They could barely discern her long, graceful lines through the misty gloom. She had moved to a position fully five hundred yards farther out from the point where she had been anchored on the previous night. Though she pitched and tossed in the riotous clutch of the enormous waves, she seemed possessed of a splendid sturdiness warranted to withstand the buffeting of wind and wave.

"Look at the *Swallow*! Oh, mamma, she's a wonder!" Ralph was full of admiration for the cocky little yacht. "She'll weather this storm, and come out of it, O. K. See if she doesn't."

"Sure she will." Fred Hall, the sailor, shared Ralph's enthusiasm regarding the *Swallow*. "She's one grand little boat, believe me."

Forgetful for the moment of their own bedraggled condition the yachtsmen watched the *Swallow's* game performance through a blurring curtain of rain.

"Oh, Christmas, I'm drowned!" Jimmy finally set up a loud protest. "I'm a rushing rivulet, and then some more. Let's go into the house and forage for something dry to put on."

"Surest thing you know," seconded Ralph. "The card said to make ourselves at home. We can borrow some of Sanford's togs for a while."

Our coats and knickers ought to dry over night."

Acting immediately upon Jimmy's and Ralph's suggestion the rain-soaked company of visitors to the mission trooped on into the house, their clothing dripping little streams of water with their every step. Repairing first to the kitchen they removed their light-weight coats and knickers of tan corduroy and wrung the water from them into the kitchen sink.

From one of his coat pockets Mr. Edwards produced a part ball of thin tough rope. He strung a double line from one end of the kitchen to the other. Diligent search of a small pantry off the kitchen resulted in the finding of a bag of clothes pins. A dripping collection of coats and knickers soon decked the makeshift clothes-line while the owners of the rain-soaked garments went upstairs in uncomfortably damp underwear to forage for dry clothing.

To their relieved satisfaction they found the large clothes closet off the big second-story front sleeping room amply stocked with wearing apparel of a plain sensible variety. There were two or three crash bathrobes, several duck and linen suits, one or two of pongee, and still others of alpaca and light weight serge. There were plenty of pairs of white canvas Oxfords and sneakers as well as several pairs of heavier shoes. The drawers of a tall chiffonier contained a goodly supply of linen and madras

shirts, hosiery and singlets. It was evident that the hard-working missionary considered suitable and sufficient clothing a most important adjunct in the divine business of changing savage head hunters into kindly life-regarding men.

Meanwhile, outside the storm continued, driving the rain in blurring silver sheets against the windows, while the wind lulled by spells, only to blow again with a force that rocked the mission house as though threatening to overthrow it, even uprooting trees in its blind fury.

Ralph's prediction that the waves would eventually reach the flag poles was verified before noon. A mighty sea of mile-long breakers, higher than the mission house, ceaselessly pounded the strip of beach on which the adventurers had lately landed. Each huge roller broke against the gates of the mission with a thunderous roar, sending the flying, creamy spray over the gate into the compound.

To the yachtsmen's surprise, the boathouse, often disappearing under the waves, still stood up against their furious onslaught. Later, they were to learn the reason for this matter of wonder.

At noon, the storm-bound visitors busied themselves with the preparation of lunch, the makings of which they had brought with them from the *Swallow* in their knapsacks. The ad-

venturers had long since made it a rule never to leave their base of supplies, be it camp or boat, without carrying a two-days' ration in their knapsacks. They found the missionary's pantry well-stocked with sugar, coffee, tea, boxed cereals, crackers and canned goods, but independently preferred to use their own bacon, potato chips, coffee and gingersnaps for luncheon.

Unable to set foot out of the house until the storm should in a measure subside, the five visitors repaired to the long living room, decked out in their own selection of clothing borrowed from the Reverend Richard Sanford's useful and varied wardrobe. They lounged restfully there, waiting for the hoped-for cessation of the rain, so that they might continue their exploration of the mission's premises.

Shortly before five o'clock in the afternoon the rain stopped and the overcast sky lightened considerably. Later, the wind died down almost entirely and a gleam of warm yellow light pierced the drab curtain of the western sky. A few streaks of red-gold, half obscured by breaking cloud drifts, proclaimed sunset to be at hand.

The sea had not abated much, however. The mountainous thundering breakers still continued to crash over the beach. For Stanley Green to attempt coming ashore again that night was plainly prohibitive. Sight of the *Swallow*, still

buoyantly holding her own as the view out to sea cleared, brought a joyful, united shout from the yachtsmen on the veranda.

Green had been on the lookout for word from the shore party. He promptly appeared at a point on deck most plainly visible to his comrades and wig-wagged: "Everything O. K. Will be over in the morning if the sea goes down. No signs of savages or war canoes along the shore of the in-curve. Could almost run the *Swallow* to shore on this flood. Best not to on account of shoals. If anything stirs, and you need me, fire four times in quick succession."

Hall got out the wig-wag flags and promptly answered Green's message. He carried a light-runged stepladder he found in the kitchen down to the compound wall, set it against the inner side of the front wall and climbed to the top step, thus putting himself in full view of Green's position on the yacht's deck. When he presently returned to the veranda, after signalling, the linen suit he had borrowed from the missionary's wardrobe was wet from flying spray of the foaming hungry breakers.

Meanwhile Gola had not returned from the tour of investigation which he had volunteered to make among the grass huts. In the face of the recent tempest, his absence had not seemed strange to the party of white men. Sunset drew on, then gradually faded into an early twilight, due to leaden skies, with the islander

still absent. Nor, after the darkness of the rain-washed tropic night had descended and the adventurers had prepared and eaten their supper, did Gola make his appearance.

"What's got old Guady?" Ralph had just consulted his wrist watch. The aluminum hands pointed to twenty-five minutes after nine. "He's been gone since we struck this place; ever since morning. It's a wonder he wasn't on the beach when the head hunters in the canoes made a stab at us."

"Maybe he was hidden in the cocoanut grove and saw them. If they were after him, he may have lain low on purpose," Jimmy said speculatively. "Still that's hardly his speed, either. He doesn't seem cowardly."

"He isn't," Ralph protested. "I'll back him to sail in when there's a fight going on. Betcha he doesn't know yet about those two canoe loads of head hunters. Something else has him going. Who's going to stand guard to-night? Ralph's willing, but nobody else seems to be crazy to take *that* job," he ended with a teasing smile.

"I'm going to stand watch to-night," his father volunteered with decision. "Hall was on watch last night. He needs a rest to-night. You three boys had best turn in, too. One of you can relieve me at four if you choose."

"Where are we going to turn in?" Ralph wanted to know.

"Better use Sanford's room. It commands the best view of the premises. The bed is large enough for three of you. One of you can make use of the bamboo lounge. I shall stay downstairs in the living room. I wish to read over some pearl data I found in Sanford's library. That will keep me awake."

Ten o'clock saw the four yachtsmen sound asleep in the missionary's own upstairs sleeping room while Malcolm Edwards kept his lonely vigil downstairs in the living room. Wide-awake he perused the pages of a book he had found on pearl fishing with absorption. Despite his interest in the data set forth in the volume he was reading, he kept continually on the alert for unusual or suspicious sounds about the house or compound.

The wind had dropped from a howling blast to a faint, eerie murmur. It moaned plaintively in the fringed tops of such of the tall cocoanut trees as had escaped the fury of the blow. Not a few of the delicate-trunked cocoanuts had been uprooted, while others had been snapped into two parts. The grove was littered with fringed tops, clusters of leaves, green and ripe cocoanuts and broken twigs.

Midnight came and went with nothing more disturbing to the night than the low plaint of the wind and the steady wash of waves on the beach. By one o'clock the jewel man had finished reading the book on pearls and had turned

his attention to an especially good map of the Solomon Islands which he had found on Sanford's desk. It was a cleverly drawn pen-and-ink map, on which were marked many points of local interest. Mr. Edwards surmised that the map had been drawn by the missionary.

"A wild territory." The jewel man shook his head deprecatingly as he continued to study the mapped representation of the island of Guadalcanar. "Sanford hasn't marked many places on Guadalcanar. He can't have explored far into the bush. There's probably a big village of head hunters at the middle of the island. No doubt this chief Bodoma is the ruling power there."

Unconsciously Mr. Edwards had spoken aloud. Of a sudden he paused. His eyes straying to a window opening out upon the veranda, he gave an involuntary startled ejaculation. Framed in the window stood a tall black shape. A frizzy head, decorated with long ear-rings was poked forward as a dusky face flattened itself against the window pane. A pair of black eyes gleamed wildly, while a pair of big black hands beat an energetic tattoo on the glass.

"Let me come along in, fella marster. Let me come along in. My word! Tell you some 'in plenty bad.'" Gola called the words through the glass in a pleading tone. "Plenty trouble belong this beach. Plenty war canoes belong

beach from Malaita. Malaita fellas after me, after my brother. They know fellas marster Sanford 'way. They come along here, hunt my brother, me. Steal too much. Catch'm Marys; kai-kai."

CHAPTER IX

HANDING IT TO THE MALAITA GANG

"COME in. Hustle." Mr. Edwards had unfastened the catch and had raised the window in a twinkling.

"Me no gammon," was the black man's earnest assurance as he came lightly over the sill and into the living room. "Me see plenty war canoes. Me hide along bush. See'm come along beach." He motioned in excitement toward the south.

"Where you stop all day? Why you no come along house?" demanded the white man sternly. "Malaita fella come along in canoe. Why you no come tell me long time ago?"

"Me no savvee. Me no savvee," repeated Gola, in a tone of humble defense. "Malaita fella hide'm in bush along beach till come dark. Me go see Mary, belong Monga. She tell me nothin' first. No talk talk. Bime bye tell me Monga go along behind fella marster. Pretty quick come storm. Stop along Monga house for while. Bime bye rain stop. Me go along little way. Come along plenty old fella. Him fisher fella. Him plenty fright. Him say see eight

fella all head hunter 'way down beach come along in canoe. He fright. He only fella along mission. He and Marys no can fight'm head hunter. Me say to old fella: 'You go along home. Me go along in bush, see how many head hunter fella down beach.'"

"Why you no come along mission house, tell me plenty quick?" was the white man's still displeased question. "We fella have plenty fella rifle. We no fright head hunter."

"Me think better savvee sure old man see head hunter from Malaita. Think mebbe come along hunt me, my brother. See Malaita fella in bush along beach, see'm war canoe, then belong hurry. Come along tell you plenty quick."

"How many canoes did you see? How many head hunters?" Mr. Edwards asked briskly.
"Where are the canoes now?"

Gola understood the white man's terse interrogations and replied with an excited: "Me see five canoe. Ten fella five times belong canoe. Plenty spears, knives, bow belong arrows."

"You mean fifty fella belong five canoes?" quizzed the jewel man.

"Ye-ah." Gola's emphatic nod set his nose-and ear-rings to swaying. "Me go along this away." He plumped down on his hands and knees in a cautious crawl. Next he flattened himself on the floor and wriggled along for two or three feet, snake-fashion. "Me hear'm Malaita fella talk talk. Hear'm say come along

early mornin', belong dark. Come along mission house. Burn'm plenty. Catch'm white fella, belong kai-kai. Where my little fella marster?" He sprang to his feet and glanced anxiously toward the hall.

"Fella boys upstairs; catch'm sleep. Only four fella belong me here. Fella marster Green go back ship."

"You call'm now," was the islander's concerned advice. "We fasten'm windows. Him door belong lock?" he inquired. "Me think Malaita fella come along soon."

"The doors are locked. Call'm fella boys now."

The jewel man hurried from the room and up the stairs to call the four sleepers. Meanwhile Gola darted from one window to another, swiftly raising the sash of each and shoving home the strong iron bolts of the heavy outside shutters.

He had just returned to the living room from making the round of the ground floor of the house when the four young men came hurrying down the stairs with Malcolm Edwards. Each man's revolver was in his holster and his rifle was in his hands.

"My word, what kind of a stunt are you getting ready to pull off?" Ralph jestingly hailed the returned islander.

Gola grinned broadly. He understood

Ralph's joking tone, even though he did not understand his little fella marster's slang. "You plenty ready. Belong shoot, Malaita fella get'm too close. That good. You no cry you kill'm head hunter."

"Not so you could notice it," Jimmy assured.

"No can get in house down here," Gola declared. "We go upstairs. Malaita fella come along, try climb up, we shoot'm plenty dead."

"Something like that," Ralph agreed lightly. "Only you can't shoot up the bush and be considered a first-rate missionary.

"Me savvee," Gola favored Ralph with a calm smile. In his eyes still lived the primitive desire to kill. "Fella marster Sanford say no must kill'm any one. This no belong missionary. Me no want bush fellow catch'm my head. Better kill'm quick."

"I'm not exactly crazy about having my head stuck up on a pole as a sports' keepsake in front of some cannibal's grass hut." Bret whimsically coincided with Gola's frank opinion.

"What about the Marys and the kiddies?" Ralph suddenly remembered the defenseless occupants of the grass huts.

"They must be brought into the house at once. I should have hunted up Gola and told him to bring the women and children into the house directly after that fracas on the beach." Malcolm Edwards' words were full of self-reproach. "I'm sorry to admit that the sudden

way the storm broke drove that precaution from my mind.”

“How many fellas Marys? How many little fellas boys; little fellas Marys?” Ralph hurriedly asked Gola. “You come along me. We go wake up all fellas Marys, all fellas children belong mission. We tell come along here plenty quick.”

“We do.” Gola was at the door leading to the kitchen almost at a bound. “No many fellas Marys, little fellas. Mebbe ten fellas two times.”

Shortly after Ralph and Gola had let themselves out of the rear gate of the compound on their way to the little collection of grass and frame huts, a silent procession of woolly-headed, shy-eyed women and children followed their leaders up the back steps of the veranda and into the large kitchen of the mission house.

“Now I guess we are all ready for trouble,” Ralph announced valiantly as he shot home the heavy iron bolt on the kitchen door. He had seen the last bright-eyed pickaninny safely into the kitchen.

“You no belong noise.” Gola thus prudently addressed the docile group of brown-skinned, startled-eyed Marys. “You all right. You no get’m kill. You no get’m kai-kai.”

The relieved native women set up an approving, low-toned murmur, chattering softly among themselves and casting timidly respectful glances toward their white defenders.

"It is three o'clock." Ralph presently called out the time in a low tone. "Let's go upstairs and make an observation. The blamed man-eaters will have to get around here soon if they are going to belong dark. It will be light in another hour."

"The later they come along the better," Mr. Edwards said. "Gola says there are fifty of them."

"Six against fifty!" Bret exclaimed. "But then, we have the advantage. They can't get at us, but we can get them."

"Provided they attack the house," put in the jewel man emphatically. "Gola overheard them talking about rushing us and burning down the mission. At the critical moment they may not have the nerve to attack. Sanford has been living on Guadalcanar for over ten years. He's done great work among the Solomons. If this Malaita chief, Feldah, should attack the mission, he'd be hunted down for it by the English government. Guadalcanar belongs to England and she deals severely with these treacherous native chiefs."

"Perhaps they won't try to rush us at all," Jimmy said as the party, still carrying their rifles, went up the stairway situated at the back of the living room and leading upward to the second floor.

"They are quite likely to hide in the cocoanut grove, or in the bush which lies just south

of this strip of beach, and rush us when we happen to be going down to the beach to the boathouse," Mr. Edwards declared. "I haven't yet told Gola about those two canoe-loads of head hunters we had the run-in with yesterday. I'll tell him now."

Gola was worked-up to fresh heights of excitement when he learned of the sudden appearance on the beach of the two war canoes. He at once said "Malaita fella," adding "Malaita fella plenty bad; burn'm mission house sure."

The three Adventure Boys and Hall, the seaman, had each chosen a window of Sanford's room as an observation post. With the room dark the watchers crouched at the open sash, ears trained to distinguish faint suspicious sounds of the night from the usual night sounds. It was still too dark to make out the flower-grown front yard of the compound as other than a sable blot. Beyond the compound the beach was swallowed up in darkness, while beyond the white foaming wash of the now less turbulent waves showed wavering lines of white against the black pall of night.

It was a starless darkness, due to the still heavily clouded sky. Imperceptibly, as the moments passed, the night began to fade before the slow advance of dawn.

Malcolm Edwards had finished talking to Gola and taken up a position at one of the windows in the back sleeping room. Gola had

quietly disappeared from the window of the other sleeping room. He had noiselessly raised the window, slid through it, swung himself to the ground and scuttled off on all fours toward the front section of the compound wall. He was over the wall so speedily as not to have attracted the attention of even the watchers in the window, sharp-eyed though they were.

On the outer side of the wall he disposed his long black body at full length, flattening himself to the ground, yet hugging the wall, too. There he continued to lie, motionless, as though waiting for something to take place.

At length a sound assailed his straining ears which brought him to his feet in a flash. Across the black rim of night the first wan streaks of day came wavering. Next instant Gola was vaulting the wall. Quickly as he went, a shower of arrows flew toward the compound wall of logs as he disappeared over it. Most of the arrows struck the log fence and remained imbedded in it. A few hummed uncomfortably close to the running islander, then fell to the ground.

Came a sudden pandemonium of ear-piercing yells. Mingling with the wild screeching sounded the weird hollow reverberation of war drums. In the slowly growing light dark figures were seen, dodging from tree to tree in the cocoanut grove.

With a fresh burst of deafening whoops and

screeches a horde of savages broke from the partial cover of the grove and began a mad rush for the compound wall. On they came, brandishing their long bone-tipped spears, war clubs and long-handled murderous looking tomahawks.

"The first one of those fiends that climbs up on the fence let him have it," directed Malcolm Edwards in even purposeful tones. "We must drive them back from the start, it's our only salvation. It's not a question now of simply wounding these savages. We must shoot to kill, or be killed ourselves. When I've counted three, then fire."

CHAPTER X

HOME FROM THE BUSH

"**O**NE," the jewel man began softly, "two, three."

Simultaneous with the "three" a new fury of yelling began among the cannibals. Another shower of arrows sped, whirring, over the compound wall. The volley of shots that crashed out from the opened upstairs windows of the mission house instantly cleared the top of the log fence. Half a dozen head hunters promptly disappeared from the wall. Two pitched forward, dropping heavily upon the compound. The other four marauders fell backward upon the beach and remained motionless.

A new, menacing roar broke from the swarm of wildly cavorting savages as they saw their advance guard of warriors drop like ninepins. A second bold relay followed the assault of the first lot only to meet with a similar fate.

Still a third set, this time numbering twelve or fifteen cannibals, swarmed the wall, to meet with disaster. With the crash of repeating rifles in the air and the demoniac yells of sav-

ages rising shrilly, neither besiegers nor besieged heard the padding beat of running feet, coming from the direction of the mission's little colony.

"Hai, ai, ai! Come along Mongo! Come along allee fella missionary!" Shouting this cheering news Gola bounded into the middle of the room where the defenders were stationed at the windows. Immediately he bounded out of the room and back to his own chosen post of observation. He leaped through the raised sash again like an animated black streak and jumped to the ground. Away he raced, across the rear end of the compound to meet a veritable army of black, hurrying forms, clad in white singlets, and armed with spears, rifles and knives, which was advancing toward the compound.

On came the armed, running force of men with a quiet steadiness of gait which indicated deadly purpose. Unlike the prancing, screeching horde of Malaita head hunters, these men were silent. In the hurrying company were at least a hundred warriors. They swept past the left-hand side of the compound wall and bore straight down upon the milling mass of howling Malaita invaders. The infuriated head hunters were hailing their new foes with a mixture of enraged and dismayed noise.

"What's stirring?" Jimmy, posted at one of the front windows of the front bedroom,

peered out in amazement at the swift change in the behavior of the attacking head hunters. While their yells had become even louder, they were now backing away from the front and sides of the compound wall in confused haste.

Somewhere off at the left of the compound a rifle cracked. Followed two or three more shots, in rapid succession, seemingly rifle reports. Then the running company of defenders appeared within his view. He, as well as his comrades, sent up a cry of surprise.

"By George, look who's here!" yelled Ralph at the top of his lungs. "Attaboy! After 'em sports! Chase 'em into the ocean!" He leaned far out the window, waving his smoking rifle, as he voiced this triumphant whoop of encouragement.

Quick as a flash he sighted along his gun, taking deliberate aim at a big cannibal who was rallying a group of his companions for a fresh assault upon the gate. The blood-thirsty Malaitan threw up his arms, spun around in a frantic whirl, then fell heavily, plowing his ugly head deep into the sand.

And now sudden panic started among the lately attacking head hunters and spread like wildfire. Without waiting to meet the oncoming army of defenders in man-to-man conflict the cowardly mob of savages turned and bolted across the strip of beach in front of the

compound, and from there continued in a headlong flight southward upon the sands.

The valiant army pursued them far down the beach, sending a shower of arrows after them. Again the Adventure Boys heard the crack of rifles. It was evident a few of the fella missionaries knew how to handle firearms.

"Come along, fella marster! Come along, little fella marster!" Gola made one of his cyclonic appearances into the room. "Belong mission my fella marster Sanford. Him come along allee right from bush. Me see him 'way back, behind fella belong missionary. You pleasee come along." This time he waited, seeming determined to lead the white men to his revered fella marster.

"Thank goodness!" was Malcolm Edwards' fervent exclamation. "Come on, boys. He and his men got here in the nick of time. We should have had hard work holding out against such a mob after our ammunition was gone. We'd have had to make a break for the *Swallow*. Of course Green would have helped us. Something has happened to the *Swallow* since this scrap began. Have you noticed?"

He addressed the quartet of riflemen who had left their posts after the cannibals had been put to full rout by the returned Guadalcanar islanders.

"Gracious! I forgot all about her." Bret looked plain agast.

"I know. Green ran her in toward the beach as far as he dared on account of shoals," Hall said quickly. "He knew we might have to make a dash for the *Swallow*. I'll bet he and Simms would have rowed to shore for us, even if the beach had been black with cannibals."

"Betcha they would. They're a peppy combination," was Ralph's instant warm agreement. "They brought the *Swallow* within rifle range, too. Oh, they were all ready for trouble!"

Following Gola's impatient lead the five adventurers hastened down the stairs and out of the now unbolted door of the kitchen. An awed, timid-eyed collection of Marys had lately huddled for protection in the roomy mission kitchen. The big room was now empty of its recent bevy of dusky occupants. The Marys had hustled back to their huts at the first instant after the unbolting by Gola of the kitchen door.

The yachtmen stepped out of the kitchen doorway in time to hear Gola yell joyfully: "There fella marster Sanford!" and go frisking across the grassy back yard at an exuberant lope.

The back gate of the log fence stood ajar now. A tall man in a mud-stained suit of natural-colored linen crash was in the act of stepping through it and into the yard. On his head was a broad-brimmed hat of fine woven

straw which protected his strong features from the sun without obscuring them.

Under the woven hat rim shone a pair of earnest gray eyes, almost star-like in their bright light and intensity. Added to the remarkable pair of eyes, a good-sized straight nose, firm though humorous lips and a square determined chin made up a face agreeable of feature, yet full of manly force of character.

Like his face, the Reverend Richard's body was in keeping. He was at least six feet tall with square, capable shoulders and an iron-strong look about his long arms. He was evidently an athlete. He gave the air of a man in constant physical training. As he came through the gate he suddenly removed his hat and glanced toward the adventurers with a broad smile of welcome that showed two dimples, deeply set in his cheeks and which gave him the expression of a mischievous boy.

"Well, well, well!" he cried in an overjoyed tone. "Malcolm Edwards! I can hardly believe you're here. And to think I couldn't be at home to receive you. Not to mention this Malaita invasion."

As he spoke he had come hurrying toward the group of five who were advancing to meet him, both of his strong brown hands extended in welcome.

"I'm so glad to see you, Malcolm," he repeated fervently as he and the jewel man wrung

hands. "And this strapping young fellow is Ralph! I never would have known you, my son, as the kiddie in knickers who told me I'd surely get my head cut off if I came to the South Seas." The missionary laughed, a hearty pleasant laugh that seemed fairly to radiate good feeling.

"Did I tell you that?" laughed Ralph. "Jolly glad it never came true. Only you must have had some hair-breadth escapes. This part of the world seems to be full of head hunters. All the way from Hawaii we've heard zippy tales about the head hunters on the Solomons. These islands aren't what you might call strictly popular for tourists."

"Indeed they are not," the missionary agreed with a humorous twinkle in his bright gray eyes.

"Let me introduce my boys to you, Sanford," interposed Malcolm Edwards. He named Jimmy, Bret and Fred Hall, in turn. "Stanley Green, our yacht's commander and Gerald Simms, the pilot, are over on the *Swallow* with the rest of the crew. I expect some of the men from the yacht will be here soon," he explained. "We had trouble with a couple of war canoes of Malaita men yesterday afternoon, but had not expected to be attacked. Then Gola came rushing into the mission late in the night with the news that we were going to be attacked before dawn."

"Gola!" Sanford cried out in a voice of fervent relief. "So Gola has come back. This is splendid news. I was afraid the head hunters had captured him and Laru, his brother."

"He was with us a moment or so ago. He saw you coming along behind your men and ran to tell us. We picked both boys up on the *Swallow*— Hey, Gola!" Ralph began looking about for the missing islander. He suspected that Gola had purposely disappeared to make way for the white visitors.

Gola had slipped self-effacingly into the pantry. He heard Ralph's first call, but did not respond to it. Ralph called him again, adding: "Don't be bashful. The fella marster wants to see you, good old Guady."

This was too much for the islander. He came out of his retreat, his black features running over with smiles. Richard Sanford welcomed the black man with a warmth of affection which made him smile more broadly than ever.

"You are here by the Grace of God, my boy," was the missionary's earnest reminder as he shook Gola by the hand and lightly patted the islander's hard-muscled arm. "We hunted for you steadily after you and Laru disappeared. Every day I had from ten to twenty of the boys out after you in the boats. We had heard there were Malaita head hunters hanging along the coast, but we couldn't get in sight of any either

on foot or traveling in war canoes. You must come along mission room this evening. You tell'm fella boys what happen you; tell'm me, all about. My fella friends say tell'm already."

Sanford had dropped easily into the *bêche-de-mer* dialect as a matter of friendliness toward Gola. The Guadalcanar "fella" seemed to be an especial favorite of the genial, live-wire missionary. So the adventurers decided, noting his plainly shown interest in the big islander. Later they were to marvel at the seemingly inexhaustible fund of friendly interest which the Reverend Richard Sanford showed toward every native, man, woman or child who came within the radius of his influence on that tropic island.

"Me come along mission room. Me tell'm," Gola looked radiant at such an important detail. "Me glad you no stay along bush. Me no like Bodoma. No belong truth."

"So you've always said, Gola." Sanford returned rather reprovingly. "That's not a good spirit, you know. Suppose Bodoma said you didn't belong truth? You wouldn't like that, would you?"

"Me no belong truth, me no care you say me so." Gola lifted his shoulders to show how indifferent he would be to censure were he of Bodoma's stripe. "Bodoma no care, neither. Bodoma plenty no good."

"Then it is our business to help Bodoma.

Don't you believe it is, Gola?" Sanford asked the question as though to a child. "Bodoma is coming to visit me soon at the mission."

"Hu-u-u-u." Gola gave a gurgle indicative of his disbelief in Bodoma. "My word! That better Bodoma come along see you, fella mars-ter Sanford. You no go along bush see him. He come along bush see you, go back along bush, bime bye. You go along bush see him any more, you never come along back. Me no gammon."

CHAPTER XI

STILL IN THE DANGER ZONE

AN hour after his return from the bush, the missionary's little domain was humming with activity. The four house boys, converted, then trained in the methods of housekeeping vied with one another in making the visitors from the yacht comfortable. In the kitchen two more "fella boys" were preparing breakfast, not only for the fella marster and his guests, but for the returned fellas, too.

The adventurers accompanied the missionary to the strip of beach adjacent to the compound in search of wounded men of the enemy forces. The mission defenders had been fortunate. They had appeared upon the scene only to bring about a sweeping retreat on the part of the fierce, though cowardly Malaitans. Not an arrow had been shot or a spear launched by the fleeing cannibals.

As for the Malaitan dead and wounded, the missionary shook a doubtful head. The head hunters did not make a practice of carrying away their dead for the sake of sentiment. They were inhumanly ready to kai-kai their

companions and post their sun-dried heads in front of their grass huts.

"This is the third real cannibal invasion I have had to deal with since I came to Guadalcanar," Sanford told his guests as the first aid party began the search down the beach under the warm rays of a sun which promised torrid heat before ten o'clock had come.

"The second year I spent here I began to put up the mission house. When I struck Guadalcanar there were only three or four big grass huts here on this beach. They all belonged to Cholo, an old chief who had come down from the island of Isabel to live. He was a good old soul. He never had been a cannibal. He wasn't afraid of the head hunters anywhere. He would often say to me: 'Head hunter fellas no want kai-kai me. Me belong too tough; plenty tough.' He thought that was a great joke. He became a Christian. Then he changed his tune. He would not joke about how long he had lived at all. He used to say only God knew why he had not been kai-kaied."

The missionary paused, smiling reminiscently. "I lived in one of Cholo's grass huts," he continued. "You see I had offered my services as a missionary, not to take charge of a mission station, but to carve one out of wild, savage Guadalcanar, one of the least known of the Solomons. I had plenty of money of my own. My father had left me a comfortably

large fortune. I made up my mind to use it in this work."

"Were you the only white man on Guadalcanar?" Jimmy asked, his eyes dwelling approvingly on the missionary. He was greatly impressed by the splendid spirit of brave endeavor which Sanford had shown.

"Oh, no. There were only a few white men here then, though. There were two or three traders and several plantation owners, all Englishmen. Frequently the traders were murdered and eaten by the islanders. Plantation owners claimed they had to treat these Guadalcanar blacks roughly to make them behave themselves. I visited two different plantations where the blacks were recruited from Malaita, Choiseul, San Cristoval and Isabel. I found a hard-looking lot of boys, even for cannibals. Most of them had signed three-years' labor contracts."

"Were many of them cannibals?" Bret inquired.

"Most of them. Going to work for the white men doesn't make much difference in that respect. These boys have to experience a real desire to be good. Remember the fathers and grandfathers of these fellows were cannibals. They've inherited cannibalism. Over half of my fellas who work for me at the mission were cannibals. I had a good deal of trouble winning the confidence of any of these natives. I

used to grow terribly discouraged. But I wasn't afraid of them, and they knew it. They learned to like me just on that account."

"Cholo and I got along splendidly together. He gave me one of his grass huts. He and I lived side by side till I had been here two years and had begun to build the mission house. I sent all the way to San Francisco for the lumber and other materials for my new house. It was almost a year before I received the building materials for the mission. It was during that time a fleet of war canoes came from San Cristoval manned by a couple of hundred head hunters. I tried to preach peace to my fellas, but I might as well have tried to reason with the wind. They turned out, three or four hundred strong, and fairly wiped up the beach with the San Cristovalites.

"The next year we had an epidemic of black water fever on Guadalcanar and almost half of my beach fellas died. You know there is a great difference between the coast islanders and the bushmen. The bushmen who live well back on the island never come down to the beach. If any of our men chance to travel too far into the bush, they are hardly ever seen again. My fellas say there are bad traps laid by these interior bushmen for the unwary."

All this and more, Sanford told them in his direct, colorful way as the first aid party followed his lead south on the beach. They came

at length to a point on the beach, half a mile below the mission from which the vanquished war party had shoved off, although a heavy sea was still running.

"Those savages haven't left the Guadalcanar coast," was Sanford's knowing opinion. "Not in war canoes, and with such a high sea running. They've had enough fighting to make them anxious to clear out. It's a long pull to Malaita in those high-prowed canoes with the sea placid. They'd never make it in this rough sea. They know it, too. They are good sailors, and very daring, but they know the difference between a war canoe and a whaleboat. I suspect they may have several whalers cached somewhere down the coast. Stolen, probably from one and another of the trading stations among the Solomons."

"Are there many good places along this part of the coast where they might hide? From the *Swallow* the Guadalcanar coast just below here seems fairly open." Jimmy had retained a plain memory of the outline of the island's coast as he had observed it from the deck of the *Swallow*.

"You have the correct impression of it," the missionary returned. "There are a couple of small creeks, however, which empty into the sea on this coast. They make only small indentations, yet here is room for the canoes to shelter

back a little where the beach ends and the bush begins."

"Hark!" Malcolm Edwards came to an abrupt stop on the sand. Simultaneously his companions stopped walking, assuming listening attitudes.

"What name?" Bret said flippantly. He could hear a voice calling now but could not locate the direction of the sound.

"From your yacht." Sanford's ears, trained to catch and recognize instantly the sounds of his tropical environment had quickly located the call.

"Why, she's moved!" yelled Ralph. "See, she's following us right along. Oh-h-h-h Gre-e-e-n-n-n! What-t's stir-r-r-r-in'?" He shouted the sturdy hail, using all the force of lung power he possessed.

Stanley Green had come to the side of the yacht which afforded a view of the island's south-eastern shore. He was still shouting through a megaphone, held in his left hand while he was employing his right arm in making frantic gesticulations to the group on the beach.

Of a sudden his voice came more distinctly to the puzzled men on the beach: "Look alive! Danger!"

"I understand. We are coming to one of those inlets I told you about. Some of the Malaита bushmen are hiding there," Richard San-

ford spoke hurriedly. "I have no revolver. I never go about the island armed. Your party is privileged to defend yourselves. In fact, I should prefer you to do so."

Availing themselves of their host's permission to keep their revolvers at ready, the six men walked forward a few steps, halting within a dozen yards of where a narrow strip of beach was split by the emptying of a little river into the sea. Along each side of the miniature river grew straggling tropical vegetation. Broad-leaved plants, bushes higher than a man's head, trails of riotous vines tangled luxuriantly together to form a green screen.

"Wait a second," murmured Sanford. "I want to try out something. Please do exactly as I shall direct. You'll soon understand why. When we start on again keep walking until you are within a foot of the stream. Don't move an inch beyond that point. I'm going to see if I can bring on a spear shower."

CHAPTER XII

BEHIND THE GREEN SCREEN

"DON'T you believe they know by now that the men of the yacht have wised us about them?" Jimmy asked.

"It is doubtful." Sanford smiled. "These savages are keen enough in some ways, but stupid in others. They seem to have little power of forethought. Besides they know, undoubtedly, our small number. There may be ten or fifteen of them. That would make them bold."

"How about firing upon them?" Ralph made daring proposal. "I mean, fire a scare-'em-off round. Green says these fellows are Melanesians and don't know much about guns."

"They are poor shots, when they attempt any gun work," Sanford agreed with Green. "The recruited ones are crazy about guns. They steal them from the white men on the plantations, or from the sentries and boss boys whenever they can. I was going to suggest that you let this Malaita gang have a round of bullets. Wait until the spear shower comes. Then follow that up, pronto."

"You seem pretty sure of that spear shower, Dick," smiled Malcolm Edwards.

"Just wait," Sanford retorted significantly.

"All right. Go ahead. Remember; stop on the one-foot-from-the-creek line."

The little company tramped along for a few steps. Every pair of eyes was directed toward the danger points. Nothing stirred in the glaring sunshine of the torrid morning. There was no sign of breeze blowing now. The leaves of the green screen, behind which lurked the head hunters, hung drooping and without movement.

Whirr-r-r-r. A spear whizzed past Ralph, who was an inch or two ahead of his companions. It sped within an inch of young Edwards' face. As though it were a signal for the expected spear shower, a little rain of the long, light-hafted throwing spears fled past the faces of the half dozen men who had halted almost automatically, and not an instant too soon.

Crack, crack, crack! The sharp voices of the automatics now broke out. A hail of bullets struck the green screen, pattering uncomfortably near to the bushmen crouched behind it.

A sudden ear-splitting, concerted howl broke forth as the white men reached the side of the natural green wall which bordered on the creek's left edge. A mass of moving black forms were in process of piling into two war canoes and shoving off from shore. Sight of the white

enemy called forth half a dozen more spears. One of them grazed Bret's left arm in passage, causing him to exclaim sharply.

"Don't shoot again. Let me deal with them," Sanford said in a hasty undertone. He called out the stern salutation: "Ho, you Malaita fella. What name you call come along mission house belong killing? What name, I ask you. You savvee me."

"We no come along kill'm you. We savvee missionary." A gigantic fellow with only one eye, became spokesman for the Malaitans. "We want one fella Gola, one fella Laru. Belong prisoner. We catch'm steal our pearl. This no good. You give'm us, we belong boat. Go along home. We belong this beach, north side." A rough command from the one-eyed man had halted his companions where they stood.

"My word. You no belong Guadalcanar. You no belong truth. You belong cannibal; belong Malaita. You too much fella nuisance."

The adventurers could not but be amazed at the missionary's remarkable change of tone. From a pleasant, tolerant promoter of spiritual welfare he was magically transformed into a stern imperator.

"We no belong Malaita. Belong—" began a tall, thin cannibal with a wildly frizzled mop of hair and a corrugated scowl.

"No talk'm lies. You allee fella too much

Malaita; no Guadalcanar. You go way now. Go take'm whaleboats back along Malaita. No come along here bime bye. No come along at all. Gola, Laru, my fella workmen. You can no kai-kai them. You must no kai-kai anybody. Now you clear'm out. You no throw any more spear; shoot any arrow. You go quick. We no kill'm you. We no bushmen."

"White fella kill'm plenty fella belong us morning," flung back the big leader resentfully.

"What you do, I ask?" sternly interrogated the missionary. "You belong many times killer. You come along dark, morning. Come along mission house plenty quiet. You come along kill'm my fella friends. Why you want kill'm my fella friends? My word, I savvee. You savvee, plenty, too. My fella friends fight for life. This belong right. You belong Malaita. You go there." He motioned the sullen-faced savages imperiously toward their canoes.

They were a ferocious-looking lot of men, with roughly slit ears and noses into which had been thrust various amazing ornaments. They wore little or no clothing, and were hideously tattooed. Most of them wore strings of white and colored shells about their arms, legs, or waists. Some wore leather belts with knives thrust next to bare skin. Others had knives stuck in their hair.

"Sea too much high. No belong canoe now." The one-eyed giant moved not an inch from his

position. His companions took heart at his insolent tone, also standing their ground.

"You no gammon me. You take'm canoe. Washee-washee south along beach. Find'm whaleboats. Washee-washee all right along Malaita whaleboat." The drastic command was not without effect upon the belligerents. Even the Adventure Boys felt the force behind the brisk order to vamoose.

The cannibals hesitated. There were fourteen of them and the thirteen kept their eyes fixed upon their leader. Sanford silently waited for them to obey his order. Every atom of will power he possessed was centered upon the effort. White-man power won. The Malaita fellas floated their canoes and sprang into them. They paddled away in sulky silence, casting curiously uneasy glances back at the white men.

"White-man power to the fore," Malcolm Edwards spoke with conviction. "Your handling of those savages was remarkable."

"I am not so sure of that," Sanford laughed. "I suspect your revolvers had a good deal more to do with the way the Malaita men cleared out in their canoes. They didn't want to go. They had something else planned. But they have got to leave Guadalcanar. If they are not gone from the island by three o'clock this afternoon I will send my military company of boys to drive them to their whaleboats. I believe the rest of the gang have already put out for home."

These fourteen fellas have been hanging back for dark reasons of their own."

The six men exchanged questioning glances in which lurked horror.

"Maybe they were going to—" Jimmy paused, looking rather sick. "They—they're cannibals, you see, and—"

"Come on. It's up to us to find out if—if well, what the blamed man-eaters were doing." Beckoning, Ralph ran along the left-hand edge of the little inlet, peering into the green depths of the screen which had lately shielded the Malaitans from view.

He had not gone far when he thought he heard a deep groan. He stopped short, awaiting a repetition of the sound. It came again just as his comrades caught up with him. All heard it.

"Sure as a gun, some one's been knocked out in the bush," cried Bret.

"Yep; and here he is." Ralph had made a plunging bound into a thicket of stunted trees and giant ferns. He had all but trodden on a still black figure, lying face downward on the long soft grass. The black's hands were tied behind his back and his feet were bound together at the ankles. He was truly a victim of the bushmen.

CHAPTER XIII

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH BODOMA

NEXT to Ralph, Richard Sanford was the first to reach the moaning islander. He turned the bound man over on his back, then whipped out a heavy-bladed pocket knife with which to cut the fellow's bonds.

"Great Scott!" Sanford straightened up with a startled jump. "*Bodoma!*" He stood staring down at the full brown features of the bush chief with an air of incredulous wonder.

Ralph, looking down in amazement at Bodoma, immediately took an overwhelming dislike to the head hunter. The bushman's eyes were closed, but there was crafty deceit stamped upon his plump cheeks and cruelty lurking in the lines of his full-lipped mouth. He had been stripped of every vestige of either clothing or ornament. In fact it seemed as though the rescue party had arrived in not more than time enough to help Bodoma keep his black-haired, bullet-shaped head upon his rugged shoulders.

"How came you here, Bodoma?" Richard Sanford's accent was bewildered. He had noted that the chief's heavy-lidded eyes had opened,

then the lids had as quickly fluttered shut again. Ralph had privately set the action down as one of faking.

Bodoma's reply to the wondering question of the missionary was another deep groan.

"Are you hurt? Where are you hurt?" continued Sanford with anxious persistence. He bent and began going over the black's stalwart bulk for broken bones. Bodoma was close to six feet tall and well-proportioned to his height. He was a trifle overweight, perhaps, but notably lithe and active. "How you come along here, Bodoma? Your fella bring me home along bush, you no come along, too. You stay along your house. How you come along behind me plenty so quick? My word, that plenty queer!"

Something in Sanford's voice brought Bodoma's eyes open in an odd widening flash. It was not easy to fool fella marster Sanford. This time Bodoma had tried it and come to unexpected grief.

"Me hear Chelah come along Guadalcanar. Chelah very bad chief. Once belong Guadalcanar. Me chase along sea. Chelah live along beach little while. He go Malaita. No savvee how get there." Bodoma reeled off this information in a weak, tired tone.

He closed his eyes wearily as though the effort at explanation had been too much for him. Sanford regarded the lately captive chief with a judicial gaze. "You savvee how you

come along way down beach plenty quick. Now you tell'm me."

"Me tell." Bodoma's eyes flew open with a patient simulation of compliance. Ralph thus translated the big black's expression. "You go along mission early morning. Come running one my fella bushman. Him tell me see Chelah on beach. Tell'm Chelah bring'm plenty Malaita fella. Him go kill'm you, my fella marster Sanford. Me say, 'no, Chelah no kill'm fella marster. Me kill'm Chelah. This no belong missionary.' My word. Me no want Chelah kill fella marster."

"Yes; go on," urged the missionary, his inflection half impatient. Bodoma was taking his time with his narration.

"Me go quick; go along short way bush. Me no belong beach. Me no savvee much. My word! Malaita fella come along fast. Me see five fella three fella times. Catch'm rough. Plenty strong tie. You no come along beach. They kai-kai me. Take'm head Malaita."

"Hm-m-m. Yes, I presume that might easily have happened under the circumstances." Sanford was certainly not addressing Bodoma. His mind was plainly busy with Bodoma's seemingly truthful explanation. It did not ring true.

"I don't believe a word he says," Ralph declared in Spanish for the others' benefit. "He's a rascal."

"You should not set your opinion against Sanford's, Ralph." For once Malcolm Edwards saw fit to criticize Ralph's too frank opinion.

"Don't say a word, Malcolm." Sanford held up a protesting hand. "I am glad to have such an opinion, straight from the shoulder. This problem," he referred to Bodoma, "is a difficult one. I find it not hard to believe most of my converts. Still this one's stories are always simply told. I have never yet discovered treachery. You understand?" Sanford had also spoken in Spanish.

Ralph's departure from English into Spanish had raised a flashing shadow upon the full, stolid features of the bushman chief. He was now sitting up with his back braced against a tree. Further Spanish from Malcolm Edwards to Sanford brought a displeased light to Bodoma's eyes. They were peculiar eyes, a changeable yellow-brown in color instead of being black as conforming to the true Melanesian type. Ralph did not miss the bushman's spiteful glance directed at him. It reminded him of the malignance of a ring-necked African cobra in the act of spurting venom.

"Well, Bodoma, I am glad we found you in time to save you from Chelah." The missionary had again resolved to take Bodoma at his word. "Now you must come along mission, belong my house. Rest'm good. Go along bush

again bime bye. My fellas friend come along see me, too. Stay along mission."

Sanford never made the mistake of flattering Bodoma by excess praise, attention or presents. He had early learned that the islanders' best hope toward progress must come from self-respecting labor. In the same way they had to earn the simple, healthful pleasures he contrived for them.

"What name that fellas boat?" Bodoma asked with sudden irrelevant interest. He bounded to his feet with the alert grace of a jungle animal. His strange yellow-brown eyes traveled shrewdly from face to face of the group. "What fellas belong boat belong fellas?"

"Belong fellas, one, two, three, four, five, six fellas," Malcolm Edwards said pleasantly.

"Me like'm look that fellas boat. You take'm me belong see, you boat? Me no boat. Me no beach fellas. Me bush fellas. Plenty big chief," Bodoma self-assertively wound up his modest request.

"Yes, we will take you on board the *Swallow* some day," Edwards promised.

"Me like'm belong fellas boat same, bime bye. Where you gett'm?" Bodoma appeared to have no interest for anything other than the trim steam yacht, standing off jauntily by herself on the rapidly calming ocean. "Me catch plenty fellas gold. Can buy."

"We bought the yacht in San Francisco.

You savvee where San Francisco is?" Malcolm Edwards did not doubt the onyx-eyed head hunter's boastful assertion that he could "catch plenty fella gold."

"Yes. How much cost'm?" Bodoma had interest for nothing except the *Swallow*.

The jewel man had to appeal to Sanford to make the chief understand that the *Swallow* had cost its seven joint owners an even hundred thousand dollars.

"H-u-ugh." Bodoma's snorted opinion made the three Adventure Boys laugh. Bodoma laughed, too, but his laughter faded into the cobra eye-flash which Ralph had previously noticed.

"He doesn't like me any better than he does," was the young man's half-amused reflection. "I should worry. He's one grand little putter-over."

On the return walk to the mission house, which proved an uneventful walk, Bodoma marched grandly ahead beside Malcolm Edwards and the missionary. Quite recovered from the near escape of losing his head and then furnishing his enemies with a banquet he stepped with the confident air of a man of importance.

"Hello, Green!" Ralph began to run as they neared the beach strip almost directly in front of the compound. The dinghy was being hauled up on the sands now by the sailor commander

who swung round and held out his hand to Ralph.

"Great work, boy! We ran the *Swallow* as near shore as we dared. That was some howling mob." Ralph and Green were enthusiastically gripping hands. "We might have come ashore to help you in the dinghy, but it would have been sheer foolhardiness. You fellows were safer in the mission house than for us to try to make a break for the dinghy, even if we had managed to bring it as far as the beach. Glad Oom Boss Edwards sent Gola over to us in the outrigger. He and his brother were crazy happy to meet. You'd have laughed to see the hugging dance they did around the deck."

"Gola was crazy to go, and Oom Dad wanted to send you word what had been pulled off over here. We knew you'd heard the fireworks, even if you couldn't figure out in the dark what it was all about. Say, those outrigger canoes are daisy. I'm going to try one out as soon as the sea stops getting gay and the head hunters decide to have their next picnic on some other island," Ralph said humorously.

Ralph was rattling off this welcome to Green as his companions caught up with the pair. Bodoma had quickened his pace with the others. He came to a halt close to Green and was now staring unblinkingly at the sailor commander. On returning to the *Swallow* the pre-

vious afternoon Green had changed his corduroys for comfort to a navy blue cap and uniform of a private yacht commander which he had had designed and made by a naval tailor.

"*You belong boat?*" He addressed Green abruptly, pointing out toward the *Swallow*. "*You fella cap'n?*" His eyes traveled up and down Green's uniform with bold curiosity.

"Oh, worse than that." Green laughed. He appraised the powerfully built cannibal chief at a glance. Mentally he ticketed Bodoma as "bad medicine." He wisely decided to keep the big chief guessing. Bodoma would be more likely to respect a man he did not understand.

"*You belong gammon. Me no savvee.*" Bodoma's heavy brows drew together.

"*I no gammon.*" Green shook his head with the gravity of an owl. "*Me commander, belong boat. What name you ask. I tell you. name Swallow. You savvee now.*" He turned sharply from Bodoma to shake hands with Richard Sanford.

Bodoma looked glum for a moment, then brightened and calmly asked Ralph if he might examine his revolver. "*Make'm shoot,*" he commanded finally thrusting the gun into Ralph's hands.

"*Oh, wait a while.*" Green had already warned the others in Spanish not to humor the big spoiled chief. "*Bime bye. Belong shoot fella yard fella mission.*"

"Me make'm shoot now." Bodoma retrieved the automatic from Ralph with one lightning snatch. Having regained possession of it he declined to return the gun to Ralph. Instead he informed Ralph that he had decided to keep it.

"Never yet, old college chum! Ralph and his little rapid-fire shot distributor shall never part again." Ralph clapped a proprietary hand on the gun to which Bodoma was obstinately clinging. Each contestant pulled sturdily. Bodoma managed to pull the trigger of the automatic. The cartridge exploded, sending the bullet zipping through the sand.

"See that? You no savvee shoot!" Ralph was completely out of temper. Having regained the automatic from where Bodoma had dropped it on the sand he returned it to its holster with angry force.

"Allee trouble belong you," grumbled the chief, scowling. "You no belong smart. You no belong good fella marster Sanford. Me no like'm you."

"Come, come, Bodoma. This won't do." Richard Sanford spoke sharply to the head hunter. "Me too much cross along you. You no savvee gun. Let'm alone. You no cross more. You say prayer. Malaita fella no kai-kai you this day."

"Me missionary," mumbled the head hunter. He broke pettishly away from the group around

Green and went loping toward the mission house.

"You said it!" Ralph exclaimed before he thought. "I beg your pardon, Sanford. But Bodoma is surely a surprise proposition."

"I know it. I'm not yet over the surprise of having found him as we did," Sanford admitted. "I daresay his story is true. I must believe it to be true, since I am here to help him, or any other of these poor benighted fellows into the true way of living. My boys at the mission say Bodoma is treacherous. You see what happened when I went into the bush to visit him. The whole farm force followed me there. I did not go over five miles back on the island from the mission."

"Isn't Bodoma from farther in the bush than that?" Green made terse observation.

"The boys say he comes from the very center of Guadalcanar," was the answer. "They insist that I am the only white man of whom they know who has ever come back from Bodoma's bush. They also declare that he has some strong reason for being friendly with me besides becoming converted to Christianity. I preach to them that they must fight against such an unchristian spirit toward another. They try to be fair, but—" Sanford made a little regretful gesture.

"I shall not make any more trips to the bush

to visit Bodoma," he added reflectively, "at least not for a long time to come. I went there with him because I was not afraid. Fear no belong my fella calling." He smilingly phrased in beach patter. "I have no right adventuring into the bush, though, for the good of Bodoma, while my own fellas here need me so vitally."

"I'm glad to hear you say it, Dick." Malcolm Edwards' strong features registered relief.

"Bodoma is what I'd call a dangerous boob. It will take a long time to—" Ralph came to an embarrassed stop.

"To Christianize him," Sanford finished with a good-humored smile.

"Something like that. I beg your pardon for—"

"Now, now; forget it." Sanford raised a hand boyishly. While he was a man in his early forties, he looked not more than thirty years because of his spare, well-muscled body and pleasant laughing face. "Don't be afraid to speak your mind about things. You are correct about Bodoma. He is violent, bad-tempered, greedy. But he is generous, and loyal to his friends. I have known him for three years, and he has not changed much during that time. I must accept him at his own valuation until he proves himself unworthy of trust."

"What do you think of Bodoma, Stanley?" Malcolm Edwards asked with an odd inflection.

He added to Sanford, "I'd like Green to give you an opinion of Bodoma, if he wishes to do so. He has been halfway across Guadalcanar, and has seen the real inland bush fella. Besides he's a wizard at reading native character."

"You've seen what I haven't, Green," Sanford showed interested surprise. "I'd be grateful to you for a line on Bodoma, as you read him."

"He is unusual. Most cannibals aren't. They're only human brutes." Green plunged abruptly into his appraisal of Bodoma. "He behaves like a spoiled baby, but his brain is as old as a rock python's. There's something on it besides his hair. He's playing a waiting game."

"What game?" Ralph cut in.

"I don't know. It remains to be seen what his game is. There is killing in it, as he has it planned. Betcha there is. Bodoma is a killer. He has no gratitude. He should worry because you fellows took him almost out of the frying-pan. He's cold-blooded and treacherous as a cobra. Look out for him."

Green ended his remarks with stress. The group of men had passed through the compound gateway now and were swinging up the walk. They had to laugh as they spied Bodoma on the lawn sailing through the air in a gaudy garden swing, hung between two tall red and

green poles. He seemed anything but cobra-like.

"You are a bum character reader," Ralph laughingly told Green.

Green smiled grimly. "Wait and see," he retorted.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE TRAIL OF PEARLS

THE next few days which the visitors passed at the mission house were of colorful interest to the Adventure Boys. Stanley Green, thoroughly familiar with the Solomon Islands, liked them in spite of their hard reputation, as an adventure hunting ground. Bret and Jimmy found life on the tropical island fascinating and "different" from that of the African or South American Tropics. Malcolm Edwards immediately became interested in the great work his friend, Sanford, was doing toward Christianizing the savage black head hunters of Guadalecanar.

Ralph hailed his new environment with his usual brimming enthusiasm and good cheer. He showed a gay, good-humored friendliness to the fella marster's black boys which quickly boosted him to popularity among the rather stolid mission islanders. The only person of the mission household who showed a decided distaste for Ralph's company was Bodoma. Whenever the two chanced to meet Bodoma scowled portentously at Ralph, refus-

ing to speak to him. He was still peeved with the Adventure Boy concerning the revolver incident.

Richard Sanford had taken care to accord to Bodoma the courtesy due a chief. He had given Bodoma the companion sleeping room to that occupied by Bret, Jimmy and the Edwardses. Green was making a practice of rowing over to the *Swallow* each evening after dinner and spending the night on board the yacht. Every day the crew took turns visiting the mission by twos, arriving early in the morning, and returning with Green at night. Sometimes Simms came over instead of Green, but he had a great fondness for the yacht and was better content to remain on board the *Swallow*, leaving Green free to go on shore. The "Malaita fella" had stripped him of his wardrobe which consisted of a narrow loin cloth, a string of porpoise teeth, a cowrie shell anklet and several ear decorations. The missionary had, therefore, on returning to the mission house laid out on the bed in Bodoma's room a natural linen suit, a wash silk shirt, underwear, silk socks and a pair of white canvas low shoes.

An hour or two after his arrival Bodoma had suddenly come swinging jauntily into view on the compound's front lawn wearing an abbreviated pair of red and green swimming trunks and a pair of red felt slippers. Tied about his neck, and streaming gaily down behind, was a

rose-colored rubber apron while upon his broad black chest lay the brass pendulum of the clock in the living room. The fancy gilt rings from which the light silk portieres between the living room and the missionary's little office were suspended, now dangled from both nose and ears. It was evident that Bodoma had decided ideas of his own regarding dress. He had gleaned the swimming trunks and the rubber apron from the closet shelf of Sanford's room and had promptly helped himself to whatever else in the house he fancied he required in the way of ornamentation.

His tactics, while amusing to the white men at the beginning of his visit soon grew exasperating. Bodoma had the will, if not the skill, to join in any and every enterprise going on at the mission. Whatever he ambitiously plunged into that was fascinatingly new to him was brought to speedy disruption by his well-meant efforts.

On a day when the yachtsmen brought a trunk of presents from the *Swallow* for the mission boys and Marys, Bodoma topped his record for trouble-raising. In San Francisco the Adventure Boys had purchased quantities of bright-colored bead neck chains and bracelets, fancy Christmas tree ornaments, tinsel, bright ribbons, scarfs and sashes and a number of cheap, but attractive, dresses for the women. There were also various cheap pretty trinkets

and toys for the children of the islanders. For the men they had bought two-blade clasp pocket knives, leather belts, nickel watches, collapsible drinking cups and a few black leather-strapped wrist watches for the most faithful of the mission boys.

Bret and Ralph had carried the trunk from the whaleboat up to the mission house. Sanford had declared a holiday for his boys and made arrangements for a picnic on the lawn. He had directed the house boys to prepare a lunch with the gift surprise to follow the spread. Each man, woman and child of the mission contingent was to receive a gift. The other two trunks of presents, still on the yacht, were to be turned over to Sanford to be distributed in his own time and at his discretion.

Since it was to be a red-letter occasion the Adventure Boys had rowed the cabinet phonograph over early on the morning of the picnic. They had placed it at a central point on the front veranda and had started it to playing for the pleasure of the happy picnickers. The music-loving natives had gone wild over it. Even Bodoma had, seemingly, been charmed into something resembling good behavior by the mellifluous sounds. His beatific state had continued until the distribution of the gifts. He had then "blown up" according to Bret and tried to "belong snatch'm," right and left,

from the indignantly protesting mission folks. The men had finally mobbed him, taking his loot from him. There had been plenty of stormy gabbling and a few blows struck. Sanford had hurled himself into the angry mob and commanded order. He had finally brought it out of the angry confusion then lectured the belligerents sharply. Malcolm Edwards had then wisely started a hymn tune on the phonograph and the atmosphere had grown peaceful again.

Bodoma, with a Roman stripe silk scarf which he had snatched from a Mary, tied around his waist over his swimming trunks, had flatly refused to return the scarf. After dark that night he had slipped away into the bush, also taking with him a Turkish weave bathrobe of Sanford's.

His unexpected fade-out had not been a matter of regret either to Sanford or his guests. During his visit the big bushman had managed to keep trouble stirring among the usually tractable mission boys wherever he chanced to walk.

With the return of the pearl diving gang of mission fellas the Adventure Boys began an industrious poring over the local maps and charts of the island's coast line. These maps and charts had been made by Sanford on occasions when he and several of his best divers had gone prospecting for pearl oysters. They

would now prove of the utmost value to the adventurers who were jubilant over this piece of good fortune.

"Oh, mamma!" Ralph looked up from a chart he was studying and cast a comically relieved glance around the circle of young men grouped at the dining room table. The table-cloth had been removed and the table's smooth surface was littered with charts and maps. "What a change here since Buddy blew!"

"He's been gone over two weeks. It's about time for him to come padding back," Jimmy declared without enthusiasm.

"Oh, gee! I hope nix." Bret waved off the dire possibility. "Maybe he won't. He was awfully peeved when he couldn't get away with the presents. He's a rare bird."

"Speaking of me?" Richard Sanford's hearty voice broke in upon the chart party at the table.

"Not just like that," Ralph merrily reassured. "I happened to say for the 'leventy-'leventh time that I could live if dear Buddy would b'long bush, and stay there."

"Yes, Bodoma is a disturber. I lectured him again after the picnic was over. I am glad he went home. You will get along at pearling much faster without him. You know how fascinated he was with the yacht. You could hardly have got away from here without him."

When do you believe you will start out, or hasn't Malcolm decided yet?"

The missionary sat down on a small oak settee and began fanning himself with his wide-brimmed Panama hat. "A hot day," he said. "I have been out walking in the sun steadily all morning. I should like to go with you, but we are way behind in the copra shed since the storm. It rained cocoanuts. They were ripe, too. The boys are happy over the big copra shipment they are going to have ready for the *Petrel*, a schooner we charter each time we make copra shipments."

"Where do you ship your copra?" Green inquired.

"Australia. Some day we are going to supply part of the world, at least, with sandalwood. We hope to have our own schooner then. I don't dare spoil my fellas by buying the schooner for them. Work is life to them; their salvation." Sanford spoke with his usual inspired enthusiasm.

"You'll go with us next trip, then?" Green said, following the appreciative little silence ensuing after Sanford had spoken. The Adventure Boys' deep respect for Sanford often held them tongue-tied after listening to one of his splendidly energetic opinions.

"Yes. By steady prospecting you can clean up a couple of prospects in a week that my boys say are rich in pearl oysters. You are well

equipped with diving apparatus and those new-type diving suits are easy to get around in under water, I should judge."

"They're not shark-proof. That's their only weak point," was Green's criticism. "Of course a fellow can carry a long knife. That would stave off a shark long enough for him to signal and be hauled up—if he signaled the minute he saw the shark. But those old-type diving suits are clumsy things. Give me the new-type, and never mind the shark."

"There are plenty of sharks in these waters. Still my boys dive and swim in the sea and manage to come out of the water whole. They are not afraid to go into the sea at any place along the coast of this island except Kai-kai Lagoon. No one can persuade them to walk even along the edge of the lagoon."

"Kai-kai Lagoon!" Four voices took up the name in quick concert.

"That sounds like a good meal for somebody," Bret commented waggishly.

"Somebody? Would you call a shark somebody?" teased Jimmy.

"I wouldn't wait to call it anything. I'd take a shoot up to the surface," retorted Bret genially.

"What do you fellas say is the matter with the lagoon?" Green did not look up from the map he was examining. "Here it is." Without waiting for an answer to his question he

pointed out a fairly deep indentation on the map on the south-west side of the island. "I noticed that name when first I began on this map."

"They say a big sea cannibal lives at the bottom of the lagoon and guards the pearls. They claim the sides and the bottom of the lagoon are thick with pearl oysters." Sanford smiled amusement of the sea cannibal theory.

"Then they've done a little exploring under water," Green asserted. "I mean in that particular lagoon."

"Yes. The strange part of the matter is that the dread of this lagoon is not the result of a local superstitious story or tradition. There seems to be something there the islanders are really afraid of. When first I came down to Guadalcanar to live one of my fellas warned me not to go there. He seemed relieved when I told him that I would probably not visit the western coast of the island for a very long time.

"Since then I have occasionally heard about Kai-kai Lagoon, so the natives named it. I'm sorry to say it has always been a bad report. A fella dives there, and never comes up. One of my fellas went pearling there several years ago. He lived to tell of it, but he is an exception. He told me of the abundance of pearl oysters. He said when first he dived he saw

nothing but the clear water. Then he saw a pearl-shell bank. He came up for air and dived again near the shell bank. He caught hold of a clump of shell——”

Sanford made an unconsciously impressive pause. He continued with: “My boy, Aloona, said he saw a huge shadow hanging over him. It had immense goggle eyes that glared at him and it came straight at him. He dodged it and struck at it with a knife he had in one of his hands. It was all in a minute, you know, for he was only diving on a rope and had to come up for air. He signaled his manduck to pull him up. He thought the monster would grab him before he could be pulled up, but he said it dived down all of a sudden. He was so scared that when he got into the boat he fainted.”

“That sounds straight enough,” Green said reflectively. “The fellow probably saw just what he says he saw.”

“The beach islanders on the west coast of Guadalcanar are afraid of it. Several divers have disappeared for good while swimming in those waters,” the missionary continued. “A group of scientists from Hawaii heard about the lagoon mystery and came down here to investigate it. They hung about the lagoon for three months, trying to bait the monster. They brought four Kanaka divers with them. The

first Kanaka of the four to go down under-sea never came up again. His manduck suddenly pulled up two shortened lengths of rope instead of him. The other three divers refused to dive and left the scientist party that night. The three professors tried to hire native divers, but were unable to secure them. One of the professors went down in a diving suit several times, but saw nothing unusual."

"It's odd that the science fellows weren't interested in the lagoon as a pearl prospect," Jimmy said meditatively.

"The monster, whatever it might be, was the pearl they were after," laughed Bret.

"It's bound to take a swim out of the lagoon when we get there. I'm keen on chasing Goggle Eyes out of Kai-kai Lagoon and cleaning up the pearl shell," was Ralph's dauntless proposal. Very likely Aloona saw an extra-size octopus; all tentacles, you know. They're frights to look at. The real man-eater may be an old grand-daddy shark that owns the lagoon. We'll hand him a few sticks of dynamite."

"Dynamiting won't do the pearl hunting business any good." Green regarded Ralph with a half teasing smile.

"All right, Oom Commander Green. Forget it. There is only one little thing to do yet before we start for Kai-kai Lagoon. It's a small matter, but somewhat important."

"What is it?" Jimmy demanded curiously.

"I thought *you* were going there whether the gang went or not."

"Not quite so bad as that. I've got to find out Oom Boss Edwards' opinion of monster chasing. It wouldn't surprise me if he put the kibosh on the whole thing."

CHAPTER XV

KAI-KAI LAGOON

RALPH'S prediction that his father would not be in sympathy with his cherished ambition to go pearl hunting in the debatable lagoon was not an idle one. Even after a long talk on the subject with Richard Sanford, Mr. Edwards was still more than half convinced that it would be an adventure which might be classified under the head of needless personal risk.

"What risk?" Ralph asked his father the question with hopeful frequency. He was fond of arguing that with diving suits they would be safer under water than is the diver usually. Since they had two sets of diving apparatus two divers could go down at the same time.

After a siege of continued pleading Ralph won. Gola and Laru had been asked to go along and had accepted the honor with expansive smiles and the cheerful assurance that, "We no belong fella 'fraid Kai-kai Lagoon."

On a still hot morning the missionary rowed out to the yacht in his small rowboat to say good-bye to the pearlers. They were taking the

mission whaleboat with them, so as to place the diving apparatus separately in two boats. Now that the yachtmen were on the adventure trail again, the zest for new scenes and sights betrayed itself in their exuberant flow of good spirits. Their only regret was Sanford's inability to go with them to the lagoon.

"We'll not be away more than two weeks," Malcolm Edwards assured the missionary. "This supposedly pearl-rich lagoon may play out in a few days. We will have to stay at the lagoon until the flesh of the oysters decomposes so that we can wash for pearls. We had thought of putting the shell in bags and bringing it back with us in the *Swallow* to a point nearer the mission. But the other plan will mean far less work."

"Don't make any more trips into the bush, Dick, while we're away," he continued with affectionate solicitude. "Stanley has an amazing knowledge of savages. He distrusts Bodoma. So do I. You will yet have trouble with him."

"My word, you plenty strong worry!" Sanford returned jokingly. "Me allee right. Promise belong mission every fella day. Me savvee. Me no catch'm time go along bush, any fella day."

"Glad of it," smiled the jewel man.

Presently the missionary had bade the adventurers good-bye and was rowing to shore

again. The yachtsmen lined up at the rail to watch his departure, calling lively sallies to him until he beached the rowboat and continued on up the strip of beach to the mission house.

Once the *Swallow* had got under way again, she spread figurative wings, skimming through the tranquil blue-green sea like a true swallow in air. Noon the next day saw Kai-kai Lagoon in sight. The atoll which formed the lagoon was broken and lay several hundred feet off the western shore of the island. The taking of soundings revealed the considerable depth of the water and it was not long until the *Swallow* lay at anchor between the little ringed coral island and the beach.

The sun had come up that morning, a fiery red ball. It was now blazing down upon sea and shore with brazen heat. The green palms on shore and the few round the little lagoon hung listless and silent. The sea had grown blue as the deep turquoise arch overhead, making the white beach, dazzling in the glaring sunlight, look even whiter.

"Some day for diving!" Ralph exclaimed with bubbling enthusiasm. "We've simply got to take a shot at it to-day yet, Dad."

"Do as you please about that. Only take a tour about these waters in one of the whale-boats first. This lagoon may be shark-infested. In fact it is only too apt to be. I don't consider

the type of diving suit we have as safe as the older, heavier type.” A disapproving pucker sprang between the jewel man’s brows. “The depth of the water is as it should be, between seven and nine fathoms. Well, go to it, boys. Watch your step, particularly on the ocean bottom,” he ended in concerned warning.

“That settles it,” Ralph announced gleefully. “Oom Dad has said the word, and little Ralph is going to take a nice shady hike under the sea.”

“It certainly looks cool down there. The lagoon is so clear you can see straight to the bottom of it. Oo-oo! There goes a shark!” Bret cried out, pointing. “It’s only a six-footer, though.”

“Hey, you shark, keep away from that lagoon,” Jimmy called loudly after the flashing sea terror.

“He’ll take that to heart,” Simms said soberly.

Jimmy merely grinned. “Going down, Simms?” he asked.

“Not to-day. I’m going to help the fellows with the diving apparatus since two of you are going down. The best way to scare off sharks is to keep this lagoon stirred up. I mean for you fellows to do a lot of work in the diving suits. Take it where there are pearl fisheries. The sharks skiddoo during the pearling season. The sea off Ceylon where some of the big-

gest fisheries in the world are hardly holds a shark during that time."

"Believe me, we are going to keep things stirring," Ralph made buoyant declaration.

"A shark hates noise. Remember that," Simms informed. "You know I served one enlistment in the English navy. I was one of the divers on the *Oriole* for over two years. I discovered for myself that a shark hates noise. I met one under-seas once in the Coral Sea. It had almost got me when I let out an awful yell and away went the shark. Right afterward the fellows above in the boat brought me up."

Ralph was determined to make his initial dive in Kai-kai Lagoon that afternoon and Green was hardly less desirous of exploring the pearl prospect. None of the others were anxious to try it just then. Thus matters arranged themselves to suit all concerned.

With Simms and two or three of the *Swallow's* crew looking after Green's diving apparatus, and Malcolm Edwards attending to Ralph's the two divers spent a fairly long time under-sea, coming up occasionally for a brief rest. Within the ring of the atoll they found the water as deep as fourteen fathoms. In consequence the pressure of the water was heavier, thus driving the blood to their heads and causing a buzzing behind their ear drums.

Each time the young divers came up, how-

ever, the net bag, which each wore fastened to his waist, was full of pearl oysters. So far as they could judge the lagoon was unusually rich in pearl oysters. Before the pair came up to stay, a little weary from their strenuous work, Malcolm Edwards had cut down several small palms, using the slim trunks to form a kind of crib on the beach for the steadily growing pile of shell. These cribs he lined with tough but flexible metal which he had purposely bought in large sheets in San Francisco. Unlike the pearl oyster of the Ceylon coast waters, which is rather small and delicate of shell, the oyster of the South Seas is a large, thick-shelled bivalve. The adventurers were surprised and jubilant over their comrades' plentiful first luck at pearl fishing.

That cheering first day's luck showed no sign of vanishing as the long sultry days came and went. After the pearl fishers had passed a week at Kai-kai Lagoon they were of the exultant opinion that they had stumbled upon a find as rich accordingly as had been their previous findings of other varieties of precious stones in other countries.

Impatient to discover the presence of pearls in the first day's harvest of thick, tough oyster shell they soon learned it was not an easy task to detect pearls in the tight-muscled bivalves, once the shells had been pried open.

Jimmy, nevertheless, had beginner's first

luck. He found three pink pearls, one after another, in succession, each pearl being as large as the head of a hat pin. Malcolm Edwards found one especially beautiful creamy pearl as large as a filbert. The others each found a few pearls, small, but mostly desirably spherical.

It did not take the pearl hunters long to settle themselves to the requirements of their work. Prospecting for pearls meant long days of steady wearing of a diving suit and fast, muscular effort under water. At times the divers were obliged to pry the tough shell loose from reefs and the very act of walking about under the pressure of the water called for plenty of energy.

The divers took turns handling the diving apparatus for their comrades. They also made a practice of opening a few oyster shells each day to hunt for "toppo exceptions." The greater part of the oysters they placed in the cribs there to let time and the sun accomplish the disintegration of the oyster. Each man had his own crib. After from seven to nine days under pieces of matting with a tropical sun beating fiercely down upon them the contents of the oyster cribs became reduced to shells and slime. With a little stream of water conveniently near the cribs on shore the adventurers began washing for pearls. At the lower end of each crib they dug a trough by which the water in the

crib might gradually run off. Their only way of washing the odoriferous mass was by flooding it with buckets of water from the little stream. With thorough washing eventually there remained only the shell, often containing pearls, and the loose pearls.

The pearls were surely there. The plentiful harvest of the delicate gems which the metal bottom of the cribs presently revealed caused the Adventure Boys to marvel a little at their sweeping good fortune. "Pearls must be all the go in this lagoon," Ralph was heard to say jubilantly, day upon day, as their good luck continued to hold. "Every oyster in this lagoon has sported at least one pearl, I'll say."

After the washing of the pearls had begun the divers made only occasional trips under-sea to gather shell. The fruits of these trips they cached in one general secret crib to be left there undisturbed until they should return to the lagoon. The pearl prospect they had discovered bade fair to be rich and far-extending.

Richard Sanford's lately-expressed longing wish that his mission boys might some day own a company schooner, had fascinatingly taken hold of the adventurers. They were in strong sympathy with the wish. Now they believed they had found the way to make it come true. They planned to bring Richard Sanford and ten of his most faithful men back with them on

their next trip and turn them loose in the pearl prospect. In the buoyant opinion of Ralph it would be a sure case of "Attaboy! Watch'm go to it," and the price of the schooner would be won.

CHAPTER XVI

"THE SEA CANNIBAL"

"I'M going to make a farewell trip to the bottom of the lagoon," Ralph informed the others at breakfast on the morning of the yacht's last day at Kai-kai Lagoon. "I'll have the laugh on some of the mission fellas who told me the sea cannibal would get us if we tried to butt in here. I'll say that fella, Aloona, was so scared he didn't know what he saw. He may have seen a whopping big octopus. They aren't exactly as tame-looking as a porpoise. There hasn't been a shark around since the day we saw the six-footer. Who wants to go down with me this G. M.?" Ralph eyed Simms hopefully. He now liked Simms as much as he had once disliked the sailor.

"Nope. No under-sea for mine this morning. Go and ask Gola. He likes the diving suit stunt. I'll handle the apparatus for you."

"You're just plain lazy," Ralph told Simms with pretended scorn. "Oh, very well. Hey, there, Gola." He caught sight of Gola's frizzed head below the companionway. Next instant he was rushing downstairs after the islander.

Half an hour later Green and Simms were both out in the whaleboats with Ralph and Gola while the latter pair were trying to decide upon a diving point to suit them.

"See that place where the coral ring flitters and lets in the sea?" Ralph called to Gola.

"Ye-ah."

"How does it strike you? O. K.? What?"

"Allee right." Gola was tranquilly willing to go anywhere Ralph wished him to go.

Soon blue ripples, changing to green under water had closed over the pair with flights of bubbles to mark their vanishment. Both had net oyster bags fastened to their waists. Ralph carried a knife in his belt and a tough steel bar in one hand, sharpened at one end. He had purposely ground the end of the bar down to a broad point so as to use it in prying shell loose from the reef. Gola had a cane knife in his belt. While their best safeguard against danger was to signal at the first approach of danger and be drawn up by their tenders, both knew that the newer less cumbersome type of diving suit he wore would not protect him against a shark's terrible teeth.

The two divers wandered about the bottom of the lagoon without finding much shell. Ralph was rather struck by the formation of the lagoon bottom. It rose high in one place like a little hill and sunk down in another until he guessed the water to be many fathoms deeper

at that point. Gola was not interested in the topography of the sea bottom, nor yet in glean-
ing pearls. He was there to protect Ralph.
Not for a moment did Gola doubt the truth
of the sea monster of Kai-kai Lagoon. He
never mentioned it to his companions for fear
of being laughed at, but he believed it might
return to the lagoon at any time.

Ralph was walking forward toward the hol-
low in the sea floor. At one side of it was a
tangle of shadowy sea weed. Gola, following
his little fella marster saw it first. It was a
huge shadowy bulk which was hovering over
them both now, a monstrous thing with fierce
distended goggle eyes which glared down upon
the pair of startled divers. The creature was
watching them with hungry, predatory gaze.
It had an odd mouth, shaped much like the
strong beak of a bird of prey. Ralph thought
he saw long fang-like teeth. He was never sure.

Suddenly it shot out a long tentacle, but too
late to fasten upon Ralph. He and Gola had
darted out from under its shadow. In the
same second both divers began to signal des-
perately to their tenders to draw them up.

Instantly the creature rushed forward, poi-
sing itself over them and shutting out the dim
under-sea light. Out shot half a dozen long,
snake-like tentacles. One of them fastened upon
Ralph's arm. The monster dropped down al-
most upon Ralph. With all the strength he

had Ralph drove the pointed end of the steel bar he was carrying into one of the glaring goggle eyes. Simultaneous with his plucky thrust for life, Gola's broad-bladed cane knife flashed, sheering through the hideous tentacle, still fastened upon Ralph's arm.

The next thing Ralph felt was a terrific jerk. The steel bar was so violently wrenched from his hand as to bruise it. He glimpsed a great tangle of coils, then the fearsome monster swept past him very slowly as though about to lose all power of motion. A dozen or more long writhing tentacles reached out feebly at Ralph from the huge bulky body of the monster, which was expanding and contracting spasmodically. Slowly it began to sink soon disappearing in the dim twilight world of the under-sea. It was soon far below him for he had begun to rise briskly toward the surface of the lagoon.

Ralph climbed into the whaleboat with more appreciation of blue skies, sunshine, white beach and rippling sea than he had ever before stopped long enough to think about. From the other whaleboat came loud exclamations of happiness from Gola. In the energy of his joy over his and Ralph's lucky escape from the clutches of the monster of Kai-kai Lagoon, he threatened to capsize the whaleboat.

"I'm pretty certain we put Goggle Eyes out of business," was Ralph's confident declaration when the first wave of excitement over his and

Gola's adventure had subsided and he had given a more detailed description of the strange monster as he had seen it.

"From your description it must have been a cross between a jelly fish as big as one of those oyster cribs over there, and a bad-tempered octopus," Green said half humorously. "Well, I told you the other day there were more strange things in the sea than had ever yet been sighted."

"This thing was a wicked-looking proposition. I know that it had a mouth like a beak, and teeth, too, I am almost certain."

"Some of the big octopuses have that sort of traps," Simms said. "They are savage as they make 'em and can tear a man to shreds with their beak mouths. I know a professor who specialized on studying octopuses and he said some varieties were powerful and ugly enough to keep even big sharks away from them. That may be why we've only sighted one shark since we anchored here. This big terror, whatever it was, must have been boss of the lagoon."

"Possibly it was a throwback of an ancient sea breed. Its forbears may have lived and fought for life in the sea during the days of saber-tooth tigers, pterodactyls and so forth." Mr. Edwards smiled as he advanced the high-brow theory.

"It gave Guady and me something to think

about for a minute. I know that. Getting it in one of its eyes with that bar was positively dumb luck. If I'd missed its eye. *My word!* There would have been something else missing —that something would have been yours truly.””

CHAPTER XVII

THE BODOMA INVASION

“**H**OW about going back with us to Kai-kai Lagoon, Dick? Think you can get away from the mission for a few weeks?” Malcolm Edwards hopefully surveyed his old friend. “You ought to take a trip with us on the *Swallow*. It would pick you up wonderfully. You’ve been working hard enough to demand some recreation.”

“Right-o. I’ve been thinking about it. We are ready for the schooner now with our copra shipment. When do you believe you will start back to the lagoon?” Sanford rose up out of the veranda hammock in which he had been gratefully resting after a hard day in the hot sun and went over to the wicker porch settee where the jewel man sat.

“As soon as you are ready to go with us,” returned the jewel man. “We aren’t rushed for time, you know. We can spend three months more down here and still be in time for the trip to India that we have talked occasionally about taking. But you need a rest, and a change from having been alone so long on this cannibal island.”

"Perhaps I do," the missionary admitted half dubiously. "I might have gone back to California last year on a vacation, but I was afraid to go." He smiled, then added, "I was afraid of not finding things the same here on my return. I've watched and tried to lead these boys of the mission to a brighter, happier way of living. I've not dared to leave Guadalcanar on a vacation for fear of losing all I've worked so hard to build up."

"You can go with us for a two or three weeks' trip," Edwards easily assured. "It's only a day's sail away from here in the *Swallow*. We could even run you up to the mission every Saturday night so you could conduct religious services on Sunday and then be brought back here on Monday. How would that suit you?"

"Admirably." Sanford's whole-hearted smile broke out in quick appreciation of his friend's comradely solicitude. "To-day is Friday. I could arrange my affairs so as to be ready to start next Monday morning. Would that suit your convenience?"

"Yes, indeed." The jewel man's hearty response betokened his satisfaction in Sanford's acceptance of his invitation.

"I can leave Nolento in charge of the mission. He was my first convert on the island and he is now my special assistant. He is liked by the boys, and that means a great deal among these untamed fellas. They take sudden, pe-

culiar likes and dislikes and persist in them indefinitely. Besides Nolento I have several good boss boys who will help him look after things here." Sanford began to plan his vacation with the same energy he put into his work at the mission.

"Hark!" The missionary suddenly interrupted his own words to hold up a listening hand. "I hear some one calling." He sprang up from the settee where he had been sitting and left the veranda at his characteristic long stride, hurrying on down the pebbled walk toward the gate. A glance seaward had been sufficient to inform him that he and Edwards were being hailed from the *Swallow*.

"Something unusual is up!" Malcolm Edwards had reached the barred gate only half a dozen steps behind Sanford. "Ah, Green is going to wig-wag."

From the position he had taken up near the bow of the yacht Green was signaling energetically: "Look alive. Bodoma. Big gang bushmen with him. Expect us, pronto."

The instant Green had finished sending the message he disappeared, and the moment after that the *Sea Nymph* shot away from the *Swallow's* port side manned by a crew of eight, rifle-armed. Green, Simms, Ralph, Jimmy, Bret, Laru, Gola's brother, Fred Hall and Harry Marsh, another of the sailors on board the yacht, now occupied the whaleboat as a defen-

sive octette against a sudden attack on Bodoma's part. The Adventure Boys had been spending the afternoon on the *Swallow* but had intended to return to the mission house after dinner for the night.

"With both Simms and Green coming ashore at the same time it looks as though Bodoma might be going to attack the mission," was Sanford's calm conjecture. "Your comrades have seen more from the yacht than we shall see until Bodoma is practically storming the compound wall. If he does storm it!" He smiled quizzically. "It seems hard to think of —Bodoma as an enemy of the mission. He may only intend to pay me a visit, bringing some of his tribesmen with him who come from the edge of the bush. You see Bodoma was greatly impressed by the presents you brought my boys. I'll say he has brought his tribesmen here on purpose to share in the present distribution. The cunning fox!"

"There's something more than that to it." Edwards shook a grave head. "I can tell by the way Green has taken command of the yacht's crowd that he expects trouble."

"He has seen the bushmen from the highest observation point on the *Swallow*," Sanford said. "Back a little way in the bush are foot-hills. Guadalecanar is fairly mountainous toward the center of the island. Green must have seen them crossing these hills en route to

the mission. He may have thought them on the war path on account of seeing them with spears or bows. But that wouldn't follow. The bushmen go armed with spears on all occasions."

Sanford had hardly finished this bit of surmising when the two men saw the *Sea Nymph* beached and her crew coming toward the compound gate at a run.

"We're here ahead of Bodoma and his crowd, but not much more than that!" cried Ralph as the gates swung open to admit the excited crowd of yachtmen. "Green says they are all decked out for trouble. It does look that way."

"What about it being only a present invasion?" Sanford asked Green. "Bodoma has no reason to turn against me."

"Oh, he is after gifts for himself and his bush fellas," Green conceded. "Bringing a gang of cannibals to the mission for presents is his speed. But this expedition of his is keeping under cover, snake fashion, wherever it can. I watched it for half an hour before I called the fellows' attention to it. I'd lose sight of it for awhile, then would pick it up again. Each time it was coming nearer. I suspected it to be Bodoma, but I couldn't pick him out of the gang, even with glasses. Then I caught sight of him. I caught a flash of something green and red and rose-color. He still has on the swimming trunks and the rose-colored rubber apron

is hanging down his back. That's the way I came to identify him in that black crowd."

"Where do you suppose they will bring up?" was Jimmy's significant question. "If they come around to the front gate it will look as if they wanted to pretend to be friendly, even if they are not. If they come the back way and one of the bush fellas shows nerve enough to climb the compound wall and unbolt the back gate it would mean that Bodoma had nerve enough for anything."

"Hear that? They are coming!" Simms warned softly.

"Let's beat it for the house," Green proposed. "We don't care to have them see us armed. You two, Mr. Edwards and Dr. Sanford had best meet them on the veranda. We'll be right behind the blinds in the living room with rifles at ready in case trouble should start. I don't anticipate any—now." Green was not sanguine regarding the situation.

"They may have seen us anyhow," he commented as the eight defenders hustled into the mission living room. "It depends on whether they sent spies ahead of the gang. I feel positive it's a war party Bodoma is heading. I hope, for Sanford's sake, that I'm wrong. He has had a lot of patience with that big brown killer."

The rifle party had time to draw down the blinds at the living room windows before the

first detachment of slightly clothed and frankly unclothed bushmen appeared. Bodoma grinned in triumph at the head of the throng. They were a savage horde, very black for the most part, with heavy, roughly cast features and burly powerful bodies. They were hideously tattooed and rendered even more uncomely by the wearing of nose and ear-rings, not to mention other ornaments stuck through healed slashes in their ears.

Some of the bushmen wore breech-clouts or loin cloths but the majority of them wore only necklaces of shells, or shark's teeth, bracelets, strings of shells, shell anklets and knee circles and ropes of shells about the waist.

"How you?" Bodoma had reached the foot of the veranda steps now. He stopped short, fixing his yellow-brown eyes shrewdly upon the missionary. "Belong 'prise see me."

"Yes, Bodoma; it is a surprise. How are you? Why did you run away from the mission?" Sanford addressed the lately peeved chief with considerable sternness. Nor did he drop immediately into the more familiar patter of the beach. He wished Bodoma to understand that he was not pleased with him.

"Me belong allee right." Bodoma drew himself up with a proud air. Not only was he wearing the bathing trunks and the rubber apron. He carried the Turkish weave bathrobe over one arm and wore the silk scarf tied about

his waist. On his brown feet were the red slippers. Bodoma was sufficiently clothed for once, even if his tribesmen were not.

"Me come along mission, my fella belong me," he went on boldly. "They want belong missionary. That good?" he craftily questioned.

"Very good, indeed. Your fella belong bush promise belong good; no kill, no steal, no strike'm Mary, belong truth, no belong cross, no never kai-kai any fella boy, any fella Mary, any little fella boy, any little fella Mary? Sit down, Bodoma." He motioned Bodoma into a wicker porch chair, then briskly enumerated further the main points of good conduct to be observed by Bodoma's tribesmen who the wily chief claimed had decided to mend their ways.

"Me make'm do," Bodoma glibly promised.

"Ah, but that is for them only to do," the missionary declared with a shake of his head.

"Your fellas must *want* to belong good, then belong good of their own free will. Savvee?"

"Me savvee. Me know. Me talk'm preach. Belong you. Belong me preach too. My word! Me plenty good missionary." He laughed, and neither of the two men on the veranda liked his laugh. In it lurked a shade of contempt for the white men he imagined he was fooling.

At a word from him, his followers had paused about fifteen feet from the steps. They were chattering among themselves casting bold, curi-

ous glances at the flower-grown yard, the attractive veranda and the two men on the settee. They regarded Bodoma, in his splendor of costume, reclining in the deep rocker, with expressions varying between envy and awe.

"You no talk'm preach, 'less you belong believe," lectured Sanford severely. "*My word!*"

"Ugh." Bodoma showed his teeth in a wide grin. "Me missionary, just same. Bring'm ten bush fella ten times. We stay along cocoanut grove. We catch'm fish, birds. See we bring'm you present. Plenty taro, plenty bananas, plenty yams. Maybe fella marster Sanford giv'm us present, too. We like belong beads, belong plenty present. My word! We need."

"All right, Bodoma. We will see what can be done for you. Now I'm going to have a talk with you bush fellas." Richard Sanford rose from the settee and went down the steps to greet the newly arrived visitors. A glance at that assemblage of forbidding, fierce-faced blacks informed him that they would be hard material upon which to work. They seemed to be typically head hunters.

They listened, with a sudden cessation of all speech among themselves, to the friendly talk of the clergyman. He was not sure whether or not they understood him. He surmised that most of the new arrivals were from deeper in the bush than Bodoma pretended they were.

It was a matter of signal relief to Richard Sanford when Bodoma finally led his flock to the cocoanut grove where the missionary had ordered his house boys to serve them with an early supper. Sanford accompanied them to the grove in the kindly spirit which motivated his every act. He showed them the copra shed, urging that they use it as a shelter in case of storm.

From the cocoanut grove he returned to the living room with a resigned air and a regretful sigh. The party from the yacht were still there. Malcolm Edwards had now joined them and they were all waiting impatiently for Sanford's return among them.

"Good-night to the trip to Kai-kai Lagoon!" Ralph's boyish features were already indicating his disappointment. "You can't leave that bunch of wild men to run around here, foot-loose. Oh, shucks! Confound old foxy Bodoma! All he's after is a bunch of presents. He's been sore on that score ever since the day of the picnic."

"That seems to be what he has really come for," Sanford agreed, frowning. "Well, he can't have them unless he and his men earn them by good conduct. He said they had brought me a quantity of bananas, yams, taro and other wild fruits and vegetables. Then he inquired boldly about what I might do for him

and his fellas in the way of presents. I said I would see what could be done. I'm going to the grove as soon as these fellas have had their supper and make them understand that the presents they want must be earned by good behavior."

"How long do you suppose they will hang around the mission peaceably?" Green questioned skeptically. "I mean, provided you don't give them any presents till they have earned 'em?"

"That's precisely the sticking point," Sanford returned in a half-worried tone. "These bushmen have come here armed to the teeth. This is the first time since Bodoma began coming to the mission that he has brought such a mob of fellas with him. It looks as though Bodoma intended to have the presents at whatever cost to me. I have no idea how long he will stay here with his men. I do know that it would be a grave mistake to comply with his demand for presents. I shall have to watch Bodoma closely. But you must not feel obligated to stay here with me, friends."

He sent a kindly glance about the little circle of troubled faces. "Remember, I have dealt with these poor untamed fellows for years. I am not afraid to be the only white man here with Bodoma and his fellas. My boys are all to be depended upon in an emergency, too."

"Oh, we can put off our trip for a while,"

Malcolm Edwards spoke with instant consideration. "We won't sail again for the lagoon until every last one of Bodoma's gang has gone back to the bush. We are going to stand by and see you safely through the Bodoma invasion."

CHAPTER XVIII

MISSING—ONE MISSIONARY

THE “Bodoma invasion” proved a dragging, wearying matter as the torrid days of scorching sunshine, rainless, brazen blue sky and exhausting humidity dawned and closed. Bodoma and his fellas had come to be regarded as an overwhelming nuisance to the tired yachtsmen and their host. The bush fellas were not content to camp in the cocoanut grove. They hung about the front yard of the mission, early and late, trampling down the ornamental shrubs and blooming flowers as they impudently demanded to hear the phonograph played. “Fella marster make’m music. Fella marster, make’m music,” was their persistent plea whenever one of the white men happened to come out on the veranda.

Their craze for the music of the phonograph had been the one hope Richard Sanford had had of helping to bring about a softening of their benighted cruel natures. Each morning after breakfast and each evening before supper he brought the phonograph out upon the veranda and played a number of hymns for his appre-

ciative listeners. Soon some of the bushmen began following vocally the hymns such as "Nearer, My God to Thee," "Rock of Ages," and other world-known selections. Then it was that the fascinated savages commenced their demand for a continuous performance of the phonograph.

"Tell your fellas, Bodoma, that they must not ask for the music all day," Sanford finally informed Bodoma one still hot morning when the bushmen had been unusually persistent. Not a breath of air stirred among the drooping palm leaves. For several days the missionary had been keeping up an appearance of energy which was not within him. The Bodoma invasion had tried him sorely. Added to the mental strain of it he felt himself threatened by a run of malarial fever which had occasionally gripped him for a week at a time.

"My fella want learn'm music. Want hear'm all day," Bodoma replied with a touch of cool obstinacy. "You no want play; give'm me. Good present. Me make'm play belong my fella. Then me good missionary."

"The phonograph was a present to me from my friend, fella marster Edwards. I should not care to give it to you, Bodoma. When my friends go back to the United States I will ask them to send me another phonograph on purpose for you," Sanford made kindly promise.

"Huh! Maybe long time." Bodoma gave a

contemptuous sniff. "Me want along now; no want bime bye. When you give'm my fella present belong them like you give'm fella boy here?" he quizzed impudently.

"When they have earned them. They've not done well here at all, Bodoma." Dropping into *bêche de mer* for emphasis, the clergyman continued. "Your fella too much quarrel, too much cross. Do wrong, then no belong truth. Come along kitchen, steal'm sugar, butter, plenty other thing. They no stop along stealin', I no give'm present. This belong you. You chief. You tell'm fella."

"My fella allee right. Your fella plenty cross. We no steal nothin'. Your fella no belong truth. Alle gammon." Bodoma's full features grew threateningly sullen.

"No. My fella boy belong truth. Your fella no do right, Bodoma. They have plenty kai-kai, plenty music, plenty pleasant time. What more you want? My word! You go along. No come along ask me more play'm music allee time. Play'm two fella time every day. Play'm four, five fella time on Sunday. That plenty play'm."

Sanford turned from the sparse shelter of the cocoanut grove, to which Bodoma had stealthily followed him, and walked away with not so much as a glance at the peeved chief. His head ached violently and he felt himself being swept alternately by recurring chills and fever.

The adventurers, with the exception of Malcolm Edwards, had rowed over to the *Swallow*, expecting to return to the mission after luncheon.

Edwards was in the library, reading. Sanford entered the house, sick and shivering, to make a staggering journey to his own room. Once there he collapsed across his bed and lay there, weak and spent, one moment freezing, the next burning with fever.

Meanwhile Bodoma had darted through the other end of the grove like a dark shadow and slyly let himself into the compound by the back gate which he had as slyly unfastened only a few moments previous to his interview with Sanford. Bodoma carefully fastened the gate and went up the packed-dirt walk to the kitchen door. At that time in the morning the house boys were usually out in the large vegetable garden which lay outside the compound. The big bushman padded softly up the steps and into the kitchen with the silent stealth of a jungle beast. There was no one in the kitchen at that moment. Bodoma made a long noiseless bound toward a half open door at the left of the kitchen. It opened into the storeroom, and in the storeroom were the two trunks of presents which the envious chief had seen brought ashore from the yacht and placed there for some future gala occasion. Bodoma proposed now to get away with both trunks.

Like a flash he swung one of the big black

trunks to his shoulder. In a twinkling he was out of the house, and carrying it across the yard to the back gate. He hastily dumped it on the ground outside the wall and sped back for the other trunk. This time he met Jerlo, one of the cook boys, coming out of the storeroom. A threatening flourish of a broad-blade cane knife in Bodoma's hand sent Jerlo tumbling back against a sugar barrel. Bodoma paused long enough to whang Jerlo over the head with a war club he had that morning added to his costume, then shouldered the other trunk, leaving the cook boy in a crumpled unconscious heap on the storeroom floor. He escaped with the second trunk to the point outside the gate where he had left the first. Five minutes later two groups of black moving figures were bearing the trunks over the outer mission premises and toward the bush. So closely were the hurrying carriers packed about the trunks it was impossible to guess, even a short distance away, what they were carrying.

Within the house Malcolm Edwards read calmly on till noon, awaiting Sanford's return to the mission house after his usual morning round of duties. The appearance presently of the missionary in the library, looking utterly miserable, aroused the jewel man to anxious concern.

"I'll be all right again in a few days, Malcolm," Sanford weakly assured. "It's a ma-

larial fever. It usually lasts about a week or ten days with me. Hope none of you get it. The drinking water is not good here, you know. This terrifically hot weather brings malaria, too. I'll stay in the house the rest of the day and take quinine. I had a difference with Bodoma this morning. I hope he will not start any trouble." Sanford went into detail regarding the big bushman's bold demands. "I simply had to be firm in refusing him as a matter of principle."

"O-o-h-h-h! Ee-e-e-e-e!" Koto, the other cook boy, came running into the library, his shrieks resembling those of a high-keyed steam whistle. He poured forth an incoherent tale about Jerlo and the trunk robbery. "Jerlo look dead. No belong dead. No speak'm nothin', no open'm eyes. Bad work, belong bushmen. Now no more present. Beli, Worla, Nomy go hunt'm trunk. No find'm."

Hastening to the scene of the robbery, the two white men found Marolawna, the third cook boy, bathing Jerlo's face with cold water. The injured islander's eyes were open now. He accused Bodoma weakly of having been the one who struck him on the head with a war club and of stealing the trunks.

"That means Bodoma is on his way to the bush," Edwards asserted with certainty. "He found he had gone as far as he could go in having his own way. Green was right about him.

Like the cobra he seems to resemble he strikes spitefully and slips away."

"He took the trunk with the dresses for the Marys and the one with the extra bead and tinsel ornaments," Sanford said regretfully. "I'm sorry. I particularly wished the women to have those pretty summer dresses you bought for them. Too late now to go after him. Those trunks are well in the bush by now."

Ordering Jerlo to the hospital hut for the rest of the day, with one of the garden boys to wait on him, Sanford returned to his room, too ill to care for luncheon. Worried about Sanford, the jewel man ate but lightly of the palatable luncheon Koto and Marolawna prepared for him.

After luncheon Malcolm Edwards rowed out to the *Swallow* in the mission dinghy to discover if the yacht's crew had noted the sudden departure of Bodoma and his men.

"We never saw one little thing that was stirring on shore," Bret answered for himself and the others. "We were all over on the port side, except Simms, watching a whopping old shark. It must have been twelve or fifteen feet long and it hung around near the yacht for quite a while. Our rifles were over at the house, but we pinged away at it with our revolvers. Finally we saw a trail of blood on the water and then we lost sight of Mr. Shark. Maybe we finished him."

"Is Sanford very sick?" Green had listened in meditative silence to Edwards' account of the trunk robbery.

"Yes. He will be a very sick man until the fever has run its course," answered Malcolm Edwards. "He says that will be in about ten days. I do not believe it will be wise to leave him alone at the mission at night until he is well again. Bodoma may come sneaking back at night to steal. If Sanford happened to stand in his way Bodoma would knock him out of it as quickly as he struck down poor Jerlo."

"I think he'll come breezing along, fresh as you please, after a week or so, with some big yarn about why he clubbed Jerlo and faded out with the trinket trunks," was Ralph's scornful prediction. "He'll swear he never touched Jerlo, or the trunks, either."

"Yep; that's Bodoma. He'll lay it to his fellas. He'll say they are very wild bushmen who don't know better than steal," was Green's concurrent opinion.

"Where are Sanford's mission fellas working to-day?" Jimmy wanted to know. "If they are over in the taro field, or in the gardens below there they couldn't miss seeing Bodoma and his gang vamose."

"They aren't," the jewel man said. "They are in the forest belt north of the mission cutting down sandalwood trees. They have only started this work and most of his fellas are

crazy to do it because it means a good deal of money in their pockets. I had intended going into sandalwood, too, but it means so much more to these island boys than to us. Besides we've made three jewel strikes. What more do we need?" he ended with a contented smile.

"Not a single, solitary thing," Ralph said buoyantly. "Only I hope Sanford picks up, and loses his fever, pronto."

The yachtsmen promptly piled into the whale-boat and rowed to shore, keeping up a bright lookout for signs of Bodoma and his bushmen. Rather to their surprise they caught sight of no one. There was no one stirring in the cocoanut grove. The veranda was sunny and deserted in the waning afternoon sun. The mission house and grounds showed the same deserted appearance as on the day when the adventurers had first seen it.

Expecting to find Richard Sanford in his room, since he had announced his intention of remaining indoors and dosing himself with quinine, the yachtsmen were not surprised at his absence from the veranda where he spent most of his brief leisure time. When, however, friendly search failed to locate him in his own room, or any of the other upstairs sleeping rooms, they began to grow vaguely uneasy.

An interview with Jerlo, idling luxuriously in the hospital hut with his head plastered and tied up, furnished the news that fella marster

Sanford had gone out of the house by the back gate of the compound shortly after fella marster Edwards had rowed to the yacht. He had not seen the fella marster again.

"I'm afraid he has been overcome by illness and dropped down somewhere about the mission premises. He said he would not go out again in the hot sun to-day. Something must have happened to cause him to change his mind. We must scatter and search for him." Malcolm Edwards showed keen distress at the continued absence of his old friend.

The adventurers came to a quick agreement regarding the territory adjacent to the mission house which each would canvass in search of the missing missionary. It included all the points about the large premises where Sanford might possibly be found.

Well before sunset the eight men had made a thorough search of the mission premises and had discovered no clue to Sanford's present whereabouts. One by one they came back to the house, gathering at the veranda with troubled faces.

"I'll bet Gola can find him, if any one can," Ralph said confidently. "He's out with the sandalwood boys to-day. He'll turn inside out when he hears that his fellas marster is missing from our city. It's time now for the sandalwood fellas to come home from the woods. I'll go and hunt Gola."

The seven men were still sitting on the veranda when Ralph came tearing up to them an hour later with: "Gola's missing, too. His gang lost him late this afternoon. He was working by himself on a tree and he just dropped out. No one saw him go. But he went, all right enough. They think a bushman got him."

"Good night! Never! That's a crusher." Jimmy looked horrified at the idea of good-humored Gola as having been murdered by a bushman.

"Then it must have been one of Bodoma's gang," Fred Hall asserted. "Unless some of the Malaita fellas are still out looking for Gola's head."

"It's not like Gola to walk into a bushman trap after the experience he had with the Malaita cannibals," was Green's opinion. "He's probably on the premises and will come around here before long. Since the wild fellas have skiddooed he has lost his job of tending the phonograph records."

"Those bush fellas got so they could sing some of the hymn tunes pretty well," Bret conceded grudgingly. "Queer that music will go across with them when nothing else will."

"By George!" Jimmy had sprung up from his chair. "I wonder if the phonograph is still on the job in the living room?"

He bounded across the veranda, disappearing by the front door only to return two minutes

later with a shouted: "*It's gone*, sure as a gun. The confounded savages have snatched the phonograph. They've taken the records, too, every last one of 'em."

With one accord the company of startled men made a rush indoors for the living room. Surely enough, the handsome cabinet phonograph and the record cabinet, which the Adventure Boys had presented to the missionary, had vanished.

"How did they get away with it so slick?" was Fred Hall's wondering cry.

"Same as they got away with the trunk stunt. Old Bodoma must have watched till the coast was clear and grabbed the stuff in a hurry," Green said dryly.

"Here's the way he did the trick." Harry Marsh, one of the *Swallow's* sailors, had stopped beside one of the windows. He gave the heavy wire screen a smart outward shove with a doubled fist. It swung out, showing that it had been cut loose from the screen frame on three sides.

"Great Judas Priest!" Ralph exclaimed. "You've said it, Marsh. Turn the phonograph cabinet sideways and it would go through this air hole. These windows are good big ones. I can slip through the lower sash easy as wink."

Ralph shoved the screen further aside and poked his head out of the opening, preparatory to slipping through. Then he bent and stepped

out upon the veranda. The window through which he had come was the last of those facing upon the left-hand side of the carefully screened veranda. Ralph cast a searching glance at the screened gate which opened upon the left-hand flight of veranda steps, leading down to the lawn on the left-hand side of the compound.

He hastened to the screened gate with a low exclamation of grim satisfaction. It was standing open about two or three inches. This, then, was clearly the route Bodoma had taken with his precious loot. He was in the act of closing and refastening the gate when he suddenly found his eyes fixed in an amazed stare at a figure, just appearing in sight from around the lower right-hand corner of the mission house. It was a curious, walking combination of black and bright rose-color. The black was the freshly oiled black skin of a six-foot bushman, the rose-color was a loose, rose-pink one-piece voile dress originally among the gowns in the trunk intended for the Marys. It might easily have reached below the knees of a medium height native woman. It missed the knees of its stalwart wearer by at least fifteen inches. A piece of green silk ribbon, tied low at the waist, gave the abbreviated costume a fresh boost toward the ridiculous. Only the sharp stone-headed spear in the bushman's hand and the gleam of a knife in his matted hair suggested his true calling.

Before he was over the surprise of the first incongruous apparition, a second bushman, clad in a striped linen sleeveless jumper dress, even shorter than that of the first fellow, whisked into view. Ralph waited only to see a third gayly appareled savage appear, then he made a dash for the window way.

"Bodoma's gang has come back," he warned in breathless tones. "I just now saw three bushmen togged up in those Mary dresses. They were a mess." Ralph gave a faint chuckle. "I don't know what they're after this time. Our heads, perhaps. They are armed to the teeth. They're out for battle, too, or they wouldn't be flaunting the stuff in the trunks before our eyes. Eh, Stan?" He appealed to the sailor for support in his theory.

"The time has come to be chummy with our rifles all the time," Green responded with significance. "Bodoma and his pets have nerve, and they want us to know it."

CHAPTER XIX

WHITE-MAN POWER

FIVE minutes after Ralph had first spied the trio of dressed-up cannibals there were fully an hundred fierce black faces pressing themselves wolfishly against the wire netting of the veranda screen. "Make'm music, fella marster. Make'm music," was their first demand, yelled in varying keys.

"Go ahead and sit down on their freshness, Stanley," Malcolm Edwards indignantly appealed to Green to handle the situation.

"Who you?" Green walked to the veranda railing and peered contemptuously down at the sea of upturned savage faces. "What name, I ask?"

"Belong missionary," some one in the crowd ventured, then laughed.

"Belong jail, all you fella thief. Come along mission, steal'm trunk, steal'm present, steal'm music box. Now I tell you strong fella word. You bring back fella trunk, fella present, fella music box quick. You no do, come big ship Guadalcanar, take'm you government. You get strong fella whip ten fella whip, ten time.

You stay along jail three, mebbe five fella year.
Me no gammon. Me belong truth."

"H-a-a-a." A derisive howl went up from the gayly appareled mob of cannibals. They had been successful in making the Mary dresses go round. Some of the bushmen had contented themselves with waists alone. Others wore skirts only. Some of the dress skirts had been cut in two parts in order to supply the demand. The bush fellas were loaded down with tinsel, beads, Christmas tree ornaments and whatever else each had been able to win from the two trunks.

Green had not the least idea that the bushmen might return their stealings. He understood their howl of contempt as arising from their knowledge that they would not be pursued into the bush. His object was to let the tricky savages understand at the start that the fella marsters at the mission house could hold their own against that predatory horde.

"Where, I ask, you chief? What name? Bodoma, that no belong good name. He fright come along see white fella marster. You tell come along veranda eight hour morning. Now you get out here."

"You give'm little music come along first," ordered a fat-faced fellow on the front row, grinning sarcastically at Green. "Then mebbe give'm cake, make'm in kitchen."

"I give you little music this," Green calmly

leveled his revolver at the insolently grinning face, "you no walk'm straight. You go along ask'm Bodoma for music. Me savvee all 'bout you. Now get along out'm here." He began examining his revolver with a business-like energy that had its effect on the rows of watching bushmen. If they feared nothing else, at least they feared the revolver fire of the white men. Moreover, they knew they had gone as far as they dared without Bodoma, their leader.

Bodoma was very busy just then with a scheme of his own. One part of his scheme had worked out admirably. The other part was not so easy of accomplishment. It would take time. While he was occupied in trying to put it into execution he was pleased to let his tribesmen overrun the mission premises.

No one had told him that the missionary was absent from the mission house. Bodoma knew it because he had seen the Reverend Richard Sanford staggering along early that afternoon toward where the mission fellas were cutting down sandalwood trees. He had promptly kidnaped the missionary. Sanford, muttering in fever delirium, was at that very moment en route to Bodoma's own secure stronghold at the middle of the island, carried in a rude litter by four bushmen. In another select little detachment of three bushmen Gola was being hustled to Bodoma's headquarters. Bodoma had decided to kai-kai Gola as a matter of spite

against Feldah who was determined to recapture Gola and Laru.

The unexpected return of the bushmen to the mission house decided the yachtmen to remain at the mission house that night with the exception of Simms. He advocated the necessity of either he or Green remaining on the *Swallow* from then on until the bushmen should have gone back to their own territory.

"You can't tell what these demons are likely to do," he cautioned. "They might send a shower of blazing arrows against the yacht, trying to set her on fire. Besides the sailors might lose their heads if a very large crowd of cannibals surrounded the boat, even though they couldn't board her. Best let me stay on the yacht. If you need me here, wave a green flag from the middle window of Sanford's room. Keep on waving it till you get an answering wave from me. I'll be on the lookout. If the ugly brutes attack the mission after dark, and you need me to fight 'em, use the megaphone and I'll join you, pronto."

"No, old pal," Green promptly vetoed the daring offer. "If trouble should break out on shore, either daytime or night, stick tight to the *Swallow*. You'd be speared before the dinghy was half way to shore."

"That's about the way I figured it. Remember, I'm no slacker." Simms laughed. He flushed nevertheless. He had not forgotten a

time when Green's estimate of him had been very low.

"I'll go down to the beach with you," the sailor commander volunteered when Simms presently announced his departure. "I've given these bloodthirsty goofs a straight-from-the shoulder talk. Now I'm going to let them see I'm not afraid of them. I'd love to get an eye on old Bodoma. He's egged his fellas on to mob the mission. Betcha he's lurking back in the bush over there, watching the game he's started. Where's Sanford? That's what I'd like to know. Believe me, I'll say Bodoma knows."

"There's no use in starting out again tonight to look for Sanford. It's the dark of the moon just now." Malcolm Edwards cast a worried glance out of the veranda at the opaque darkness of the moonless tropical night which had dropped down upon the landscape like a black curtain. "At sun-up four of us had best go out and search for him while the other four hold the house against these bushmen. If we all go out together to search for Sanford, it means the whole savage crowd of them will be into the house before we are out of sight of the house."

Green and Simms let themselves out of the wire veranda gate and went down the steps precisely as though there were no head hunters nearer than the middle of the island. A goodly

number of the bushmen had settled themselves for the night on the thick soft lawn grass, though a few had gone foraging for a supper which had not been forthcoming at the mission.

Ready for a quick draw, Green and Simms reached the beach without incident. Green stood on the sand where he had given the dinghy a final vigorous shove watching the rowboat almost to the yacht. He turned toward the mission house, strolling slowly along and taking his time about fastening the gate. Of a sudden he found himself very tired. He laid it to the fact of as yet having had no supper. In their excitement over Sanford's disappearance none of the yachtsmen had stopped to consider their usual evening meal.

As he sauntered up the hard-packed walk to the house he was conscious of the eyes of the wild visitors upon him. He smiled to himself as he reflected that it was only his erect carriage and bold purposeful manner that served to keep the fierce, cruel bush denizens from leaping upon him in numbers and fairly ripping his head from his shoulders. White-man power was the magic which alone would protect him. He must keep up that appearance of power whether sick or well.

Next morning, at sunrise, Green, Malcolm Edwards and Jimmy ate an early breakfast and started out on their hunt for Sanford. They found the mission boys very angry and a

good deal alarmed at the presence of Bodoma's bushmen on the mission premises. The white men were not surprised to find even the oldest of Sanford's converts sharpening their cane knives and spears. The small military company of extra good conduct men who had been trained in rifle practice were also busy cleaning up their old-type rifles. There was no longer an atmosphere of work in the air. It was war that now seemed imminent. The news of Sanford's disappearance had not yet broken out. The house boys were still under the impression that he was ill in his room. Green and Mr. Edwards had decided not to divulge it just then. Once the mission boys got wind of it they would rush off helter-skelter, to search for their revered fella marster, thus bringing on an islanders' war which Malcolm Edwards knew Sanford would reckon as a great calamity.

Coming out of the house to the veranda that morning at about eleven o'clock, Ralph suddenly turned back to the door. He called, "Look who's here!" into the living room and walked forward to meet Bodoma, attired in a unique calling costume, who was just mounting the steps.

Ralph fought down with difficulty a desire to shout with laughter. In one of the trunks Bret had placed a green satin-napped high hat which had ensnared his humorous fancy from a costume shop window in San Francisco. He had

laughingly argued that almost all the funny pictures he had ever seen of cannibals showed them as wearing strings of beads and high hats. He had paid fifteen dollars for the hat, fully intending to present it to a South Sea islander when the Adventure Boys should arrive at the Solomons.

Bodoma had seized upon the hat as a rare treasure. It had an extra size crown which set well down upon his bullet-shaped head, his hair being straight and thin instead of thick and kinky. He wore a brilliant red and blue-flowered crêpe kimono which left off at his knees and was belted in at the waist by a wide leather belt which bristled with knives. He had evidently worn out the red slippers, for his feet were bare. He was loaded down with beads and tinsel ornaments. He had even fastened a piece of gold tinsel in the end of his nose ring.

"Good-day." He greeted Ralph with his usual slow, impudent grin. "Where you big fella marster? Me want talk, talk him."

"Who you?" Ralph calmly surveyed Bodoma as though he had never before seen him.

"You savvee me." Bodoma's smile changed to a scowl. "Me good friend fella marster Sanford. You let me come along in. Live'm house till fella marster Sanford come along—." The savage stopped abruptly.

"How do you know he is away?" Ralph shot the question at Bodoma.

Its abruptness confused the wily chief for an instant. "House boy tell'm," he declared after another blank pause.

"Houseboy no savvee. You too much lie, Bodoma. No belong truth, nohow. You savvee where is fella marster Sanford. Now you tell me. You no tell me, I catch'm you; lock'm you up, quick. Can do."

"You wait. Come along now tell'm you where fella marster is." Bodoma's eyes had begun to emit their spiteful cobra-like gleam. The very sight of Ralph angered him. "Me, me, me," he tapped his own brown chest with an emphatic finger; "me catch'm fella marster, catch'm phonograph, catch'm trunk. You want fella marster you belong this. You give'm me big boat; belong me. Then I giv'm back fella marster. Him belong sick. Get'm well pretty soon. You no give'm me boat, belong fella marster head me. Belong body, my fella. They kai-kai. Now me go. Come back bime bye. You tell'm then. You no try kill'm me. Me die, fella marster die, too. Him my house in bush. Bushmen there never come along here. I stay away long, they get tired wait, kai-kai fella marster." With a last malignantly triumphant grin Bodoma wheeled and went down the steps.

Bret and the two sailors had overheard a part of Ralph's interview with Bodoma from the living room windows. When Green, Mr.

Edwards and Jimmy came in at noon with no clue to the missing clergyman's whereabouts they were treated to Ralph's exciting news.

"The thing to do is to grab Bodoma when he comes back again," was Green's purposeful plan. "He is going to lead an expedition into the bush after Sanford whether he wants to or not. Monga and Laru can handle him. You fellows ought to go, too, I'd like to go, but I'll have to stay here and watch these bushmen. I don't want them to know what has become of Bodoma if I can manage to keep them in the dark about it. We'll have to do some slick work to catch Bodoma. Ralph has threatened him with catching him and locking him up. He'll watch his step."

"He'll come back to the house again to see Dad," prophesied Ralph. "He can't stand me, so he wouldn't give a flip for what I said."

"He has nerve to come to us with such a preposterous proposal." Mr. Edwards' jaws set sternly. "He is trading upon our regard for Sanford for his own safety. He thinks we would not dare lay a hand on him since he is the only one who can bring Dick back home. Well, Bodoma is going to meet with a cropper."

"I guess, yes," Ralph concurred with cheerful stress.

"Monga and Laru are the men we want for this trip inland. I don't like the idea of leaving you alone here, Stanley, yet we ought to go

into the bush, six white men strong, at the very least. We need you with us, but none of us except you can handle these islanders successfully. Between trying to keep the mission boys calm and making that crowd of bushmen behave themselves, you'll have your hands full." The jewel man regarded Stanley with an apprehensive gaze.

"I'll get away with it." Green's quiet reply was full of resolution. "Now let's plan the trap that is going to be sprung on Bodoma. We must catch him away from the house. I'll set Laru to trailing him this afternoon and find out where he goes. He has not been much with his fellas. He must have some secret hanging-out place. If we can find him in it and take him from there, so much the better."

Laru welcomed the news of the expedition into the bush with wild joy. He was only too glad of an opportunity to trail Bodoma, who, he was confident, had carried off Gola as well as his fella marster. He cleverly shadowed the troublesome chief, discovering that Bodoma had a secret sheltering little cavern of his own down the beach not far from the spot where the yachtsmen had found him in the clutches of Chelah's fellas.

Two days passed, but Bodoma did not reappear at the mission house to demand the white men's answer. On the third after following the bush chief's interview with Ralph, Laru

came running to the house at top speed to say that he had seen Bodoma fast asleep in his cave. He had also learned the secret of Bodoma's interest in the cave which belonged on the mission's premises. Bodoma had found gold in the little stream which flowed down over the rocks there and emptied into the sea.

"Then we are ready to start for the bush," Malcolm Edwards declared. "I can only hope Bodoma will stay asleep until we reach the cave."

Ever since Laru had taken to shadowing Bodoma the bush party had had their knapsacks packed and ready. They also carried packs of moderate weight. Ralph had contrived a leather harness for Bodoma. The chief's hands were to be tied behind his back. If he became obstreperous he was to be handcuffed to Malcolm Edwards. The outlook was not specially bright for Bodoma.

Stanley Green would have liked to go with the kidnaping party. He deemed it wisest, however, to remain at the house. He was aware of his influence over the bushmen and knew he must do all to strengthen it and nothing to lessen it. It had been agreed that, in the event of failing to capture Bodoma, the bush party should hurry back to the house.

When twilight came and went without their return, and night settled into welcome coolness after the hot day, Stanley could but believe that

the bush party had successfully captured Bodoma and was on the way to the rescue of Richard Sanford. With everything seemingly peaceful on the yacht Green sat on the veranda until midnight, hand always near his revolver, watching the maneuvers of the considerable number of bushmen on the lawn who still persisted in hanging about close to the veranda, particularly at night. Some of them continued to tease for presents, music, cake and candy. He had come to the point of not answering any of the pleading requests, grown annoying from constant repetition.

Out of patience he sat frowning at the tiresomely reiterated pleas. The pleaders were more insistent than usual. He caught an ugly note in more than one voice. His head had begun to ache and he felt like one who had been bruised and beaten. Gradually as he sat there every bone in his body began to ache.

When he finally decided to turn in at two o'clock in the morning it was merely to lie down in the hammock on the veranda, where he could catch the slightest sound, there to doze fitfully. Before daylight Green had come to a realization of a dismaying fact. He was a very sick man. Chills and fever had "got" him. He had suddenly grown weak, too. So weak that he staggered when he rose from the hammock. He decided to go into the house to the missionary's medicine cabinet for quinine. Sanford

had told his guests where to find the drug in the event of fever.

At least twenty bushmen still lay on the thick lawn grass where they had slept during the night. They were stretched indolently at ease, yet not a movement of the white man on the veranda was lost upon them. It cost Green immense physical effort to rise from the hammock, stretch his arms over his head in natural fashion, then saunter along the veranda to the front door of the house. Within the shelter of the living room he collapsed into an exhausted heap on the floor.

He lay there for a few minutes, then managed to get to his feet and go on to the missionary's room to the medicine cabinet. He took a stiff dose of quinine then felt sicker than ever. The quinine made his ears buzz maddeningly, and caused his knees to tremble. Nevertheless he pulled himself together and went back to the veranda.

During the next ten days Green saw everything as through a grayish haze. The fever raged within his veins, throwing him into alternate shivering and burning-up spells. Through it all remained the terrible necessity of keeping up the appearance of a well man, replete with "white-man power." He dared not venture walking in the compound for fear of falling down and thus betraying his weakness. A misstep and fall in sight of the

ubiquitous black throng would mean a dozen bushmen at his throat and a quick knifing. Then his head would be carried away to deck a pole in one of Bodoma's villages.

Not even the house boys, Jerlo and Koto, knew that Green was ill. He had ordered his meals brought to the missionary's room and picked at them there. Mostly he could not eat at all and was obliged to roll the untouched food in paper and cache it until he should be well enough to throw it into the ocean.

At the end of two weeks Green was well again. His unwelcome hangers-on were still camping out at the mission house. The lawn, once Richard Sanford's pride, was a wreck. The grass was worn down to unsightly bare spots, the flowering plants and shrubs were broken down and crushed. The temper of the long-suffering mission boys had reached the breaking point. War in the near future between them and the troublesome visitors promised to be a certainty.

Then—one morning Green awoke, dismayed, from the first sound sleep he had had since the fever gripped him, to find something missing. Where were the rows of grotesque ugly black faces he had been in the habit of seeing continually for the past two weeks? Not a bushman was in sight. They were gone. When they had departed he could not guess. They had been holding down the front yard of the

compound when traitorous sleep had overwhelmed him and chained his weary eyelids. He had slept not more than two hours. He smiled grimly. He might have wakened with the savages at his throat. He had certainly been careless, he reflected. Instead of attack, he had awakened to the relieved fact that Bodoma's bushmen had vanished as unexpectedly as they had appeared there.

CHAPTER XX

IN THE BUSH

SHORTLY after Stanley Green had discovered the vanishment of Bodoma's bushmen, Kerba and several of the mission boys came running to him with the news that they had seen the bush fellas racing through the cocoanut grove that morning just at daylight on a fast run toward the bush. Kerba and Keno, another of the mission boys, had hastened after the departing bushmen and followed them a little way, then hurried back to fella marster Green with the information.

"That's a bad outlook," Green told Simms when the pilot came over to the mission house that morning as was his custom since Green had been living alone there. "Bodoma was to come back for an answer about the *Swallow*. That was his arrangement, even if it wasn't ours. We hadn't said we wouldn't give the *Swallow* for Sanford's safe return. But he never came back. I'm afraid——" Green paused, his eyes meeting Simms' with dark significance.

"You think our fellows may have—got the worst of it?" Simms inquired half hesitatingly.

He looked apprehensive for a second, then said in a sturdy tone: "No, sir, I'll bet our gang will come through, and bring Sanford back with them. There's a lot in gun-power. If our gang has gone to the center of the bush they'll be able to scare the eyes out of those wild middle-island head hunters. You've seen 'em. So have I. You know what they are."

"Yes. I've thought of all that. It's the traps and pits the blamed savages set for strangers that I'm afraid some of the gang may stumble upon," Green replied soberly. "Tell you what, Simms, if the fellows aren't back by Friday, I'm going into the bush after them. Do you want to go along? The boys on the *Swallow* can take care of her."

"There's my hand on it. Count on me." Simms's strong brown hand found Green's tight-gripping fingers.

While Stanley Green and Gerald Simms were planning a rescue expedition of two in the bush, in behalf of their missing comrades, the six white men and the two mission boys had steadily tramped their perilous way toward the center of the island.

Their way led them first along a river where the going was made hard by bush-choked stretches and thorny thickets. After a day's travel the party reached the grass lands. These were not difficult to traverse and the third day

found them in the foot-hills following a mountainous trail evidently made by the mysterious bush fellas of the central part of the island who knew little except to take heads and kai-kai all comers to their jungle haunts.

The adventurers had plenty of near mishaps, but no actual ones. Once a long, bone-headed arrow had whizzed past Bret's head, barely missing his ear. He had been tramping along by himself at least a dozen yards from his companions when the arrow came. Immediately, the others had fired their rifles into the bushes on all sides. Nothing had stirred in that dank dark forest, either human or animal. Only a terrible silence had settled upon the forbidding jungle after the echo of the rifle shots had died out. Monga and Laru, versed in the ways of the hostile inland dwellers of Guadalcanar, had halted the hikers until they had done a little investigating. They presently uncovered a bow, hidden among the bushes, standing upright. It had been fitted with an arrow and sprung by means of a tough fiber arranged so that contact with Bret's foot had released the taut bow.

Another time Ralph had plunged one leg to the knee in a pit from which he had extricated himself by making a desperate lunge forward when he felt his one leg slipping. The movement threw him face downward on the ground but saved him a fall into a six-foot pit, the bot-

tom of which was lined with upright spear heads. More than once afterward the adventurers narrowly escaped falling into pits of the same sort, or those having a single sharp stake standing up in the middle.

Once a good-sized rock, bound about by green vines hurtled down from a tree when Malcolm Edwards reached out to pull aside a growth of creeper that was conspicuously impeding the narrow trail they were endeavoring to follow.

It was a hard, tiresome journey, made harder by the closeness of the fetid jungle air, heavy with the dank odor of rotting vegetation and alive with numbers of pestiferous insects. The ground under their feet was black, soggy muck. The deeper into the jungle they went the more humid and suffocating the air seemed. It was hard going. As they proceeded the vegetation became monstrous of growth and blocked their way. Huge-leaved plants, knotted rope-like climbers, immense banyan trees with great sprawling roots and ferns twice the height of a man made up this strange, unreal-looking forest into which they had ventured. Gorgeous scarlet and golden orchids flaunted their brilliant colors amid the dark green while flocks of white cockatoos with hoarse voices and companies of small mottled birds which made no chirp or song added to the weirdness of the strange jungle.

It was five days after their start when they

reached a point below the village which they believed to be Bodoma's stronghold. While the six white men remained where they were, Laru and Monga stealthily climbed the steep runway leading up to the village to discover what was going on up there. After two or three hours away from the rescue party, who were impatiently awaiting their return, the two islanders appeared with the amazing news that there was no one to be seen in the village except Marys and little fellas. Laru had stopped in front of what he took to be Bodoma's grass house and carefully examined the rows of heads which ornamented the poles in front of the house. He had not seen fella marster Sanford's head among them.

When, later in the day, a resolute party of eight men climbed the runway to the village it was with the determination to search every nook and corner of the village for the kidnaped missionary and Gola. The appearance of the group of white men brought wild, frightened cries from the women. They ran out of their huts and into the bush, gathering up the children as they scurried out of sight, and taking the little ones along with them.

In the largest of the collection of about two dozen huts they found Richard Sanford, still delirious with fever, emaciated, gaunt and hollow-eyed. Gola they did not find until they had searched a while. At last they discovered

him tied to a tree behind one of the smaller huts. He was so securely fastened as to prohibit any possibility of escape on his part. He was overjoyed at sight of Laru, who reached him first and untied him. He had expected to be killed and kai-kaied when Bodoma returned, he told them. Bodoma intended he should be the victim for the sake of spiting Feldah who had demanded that Gola should be turned over to him.

"Where is Bodoma? Where are the rest of these bush demons?" Ralph asked with tense excitement. "We've been thinking right along that there was going to be a big fight when we got to Bodoma's burg. Here we are, Sanford and you are found and it looks as though not a spear will come our way when we get ready to blow."

"Tha's right," Gola nodded with his wildest smile. "But we don't wait. Go along quick. Bodoma belong big fight. Five fella day gone Bodoma hear one chief over there," Gola pointed toward the south, "come along pretty soon, burn'm grass house, take'm head all Bodoma fella. This big chief, Calloa. Have plenty fella warrior. Bodoma send'm quick one bushman, tell'm bush fella hang around mission hurry bush. They come along two day gone. Bodoma head'm war fella. Bodoma mebbe kill'm Calloa, take'm head. Then come along bush plenty quick. We go along now."

Gola's view of the situation was shared by the rescue party. Sanford was too ill to be moved in any way other than upon a litter. Gola and Laru constructed one of trails of tough-fibered vine, piling upon it the blankets of the party to make it comfortable for the sick man. Before dark that day the little procession had gladly left behind that dark abode of horror with its dozens of sun-dried heads stuck up on poles in front of every grass hut. Most of the heads were those of black men, but there were three or four in front of Bodoma's hut which were the heads of white men. They could only be thankful that Richard Sanford's head would not be added to the number already there.

It was a much harder journey going back to the mission on account of having to carry the sick man on the litter. Little by little they won away from the dank dark forest stretches and came gladly at last to the grass lands again. From there it was only a day's journey to the mission house.

On the afternoon before the day which Green had set as the time limit of absence of the rescue party before starting for the bush himself he was busily engaged on shipboard in making up a pack for the journey. Coming on deck from his stateroom after he had finished, his eyes became suddenly glued to something he had glimpsed on shore.

Out on the white strip of beach and headed

for the compound gate was a little company of white-helmeted men, bearing among them a litter. The litter was furnished with a back and top and on it sat a man, leaning back against the supporting frame. A loud jubilant yell of: "Sanford," broke from Green's lips. Five minutes later the dinghy with Green and Simms rowing their fastest was skimming over the sea to the beach.

The party had stopped on the beach and were hallooing at top voice to the men on the yacht. Their shouts grew wilder and more jubilant as they saw the dinghy put off from the *Swallow* with their two comrades in it. Even Sanford, weak though he still was, was waving a hand and shouting joyfully.

By the time Richard Sanford had reached his own veranda and had been carefully placed in the hammock the news of his return had somehow communicated itself to his devoted mission boys. They came in a loyal rush to greet their fella marster, chattering and rejoicing over him. Even the Marys forsook their own little houses to come timidly around to the veranda and welcome the fella marster back from the jaws of death.

"I don't remember much about what happened after I fell down over there near where the boys were cutting sandalwood," Sanford told his friends later as they all sat around him in the living room talking over the exciting hap-

penings of the past few weeks. "The first clear memory I have of anything is that of being carried through the bush over some big black bushman's shoulder. I had only a rational idea now and then, most of the time I didn't know where I was at. And to think Bodoma wanted you to exchange the yacht for me! As Ralph likes to say; he had nerve!" The missionary showed quiet amusement.

"There are plenty of yachts in the world but only one Richard Sanford," Ralph said boyishly. "Bodoma knew he had us on that score. He may have lost out himself by this time. Maybe his head is up in front of Calloa's grass house now. If it isn't, I don't believe he will ever come near you again. He will be afraid of getting into trouble for having kidnaped you and threatened to kill you."

"No. I don't believe Bodoma will ever show his face at the mission again," the missionary agreed. "I have surely made you fellows a lot of trouble, not to mention the dangers to which you cheerfully exposed yourselves for me. I owe my life to you. I should never have left the bush alive if you had not come for me. Nor Gola, either, I am afraid. What can I ever do to repay you?"

"There's only one thing you can do." Ralph surveyed the earnest-faced missionary with dancing eyes.

"And what is that?" Sanford asked eagerly.

"Go with us on our next pearling trip. That will be as soon as you are strong enough to walk around. Leave the mission boys to run the place and come along with us. We've only begun to tap our pearl prospect. The best is yet to come."

"I'll be only too glad to go," Sanford came back warmly. "Only, I wish you would not feel impelled to share your findings with me."

"That's the best part," Malcolm Edwards declared seriously. "We are thinking about that schooner your boys want to own and operate some day. There are pearls enough, and more than enough for us all in the lagoon. I'm pretty sure of that."

"Plenty pearls belong lagoon," Green said, smiling. "Plenty pearls and plenty adventure. Perhaps the adventure's worth more than the pearls. It ought to be since we are the—"

"Adventure Boys," swelled the lusty chorus on the drowsy air. "Three cheers for the Adventure Boys!"

And the heart for adventure, and still more adventure, was in their voices as they cheered.

THE END

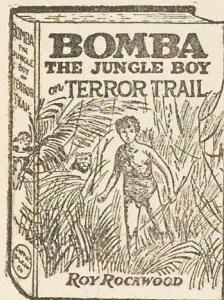
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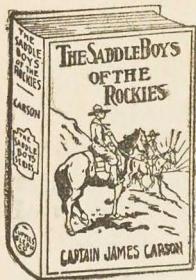
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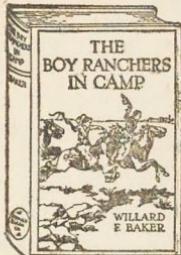
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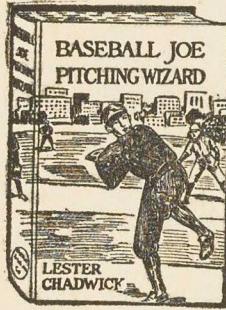
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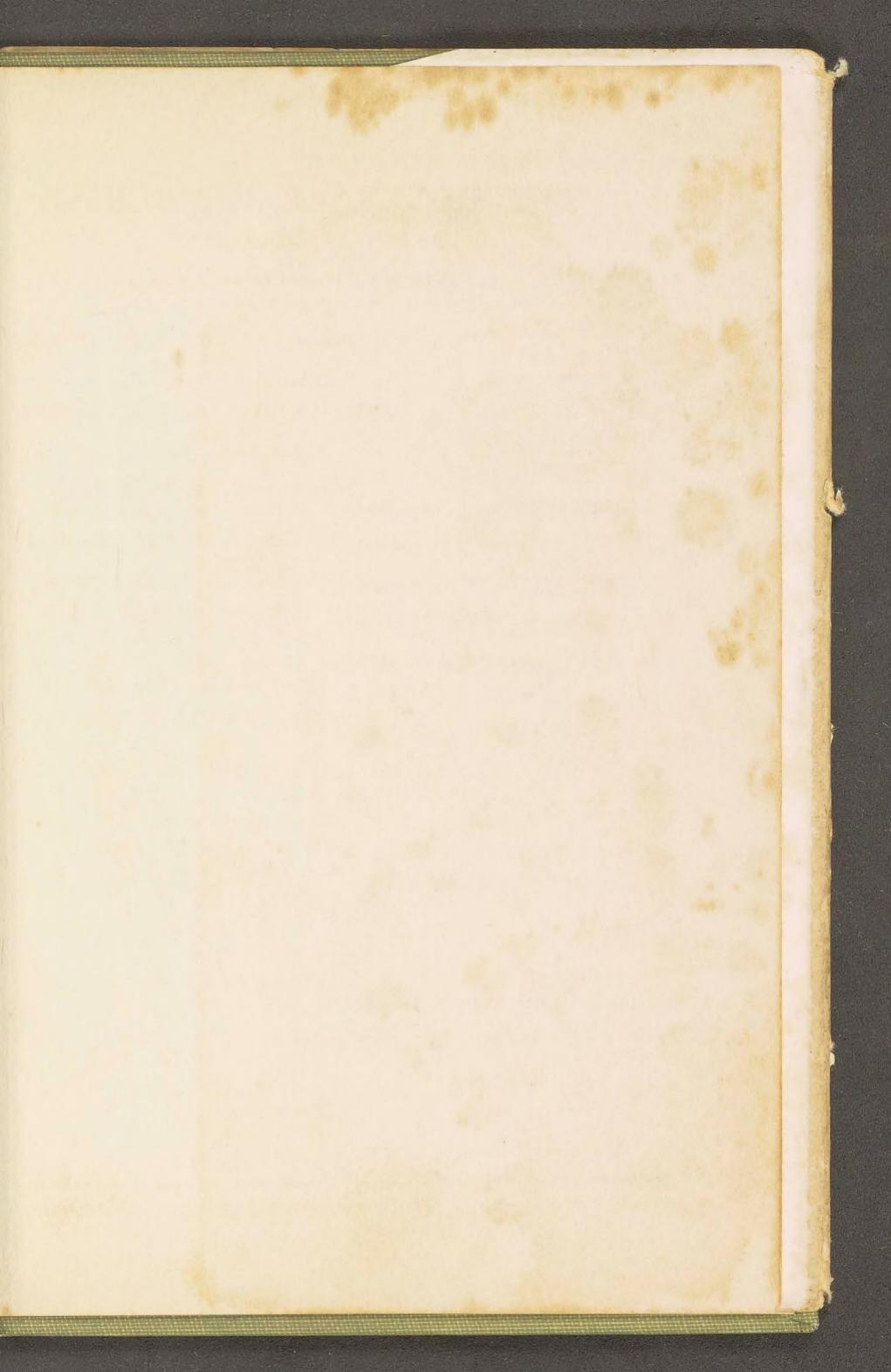
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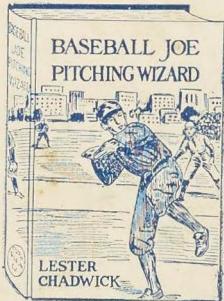
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